36349

National Library of Canada | Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE | THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE

NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* Phyllis Eleanor Baldwin

TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* The Educational Thought of Mrs. Gaskell – A Study in Industrialism and the Education of Women

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* University of Alberta

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/*GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* Master of Education

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* 1978

NAME OF SUPERVISOR/*NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE* Dr. Peter Miller

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

DATED/*DATÉ* April 19 1978 SIGNED/*SIGNÉ* Phyllis Baldwin

PERMANENT ADDRESS/*RÉSIDENCE FIXÉ* 11755-35A Avenue
Edmonton T6J 0B4
Alberta

NL-91 (3-74)

National Library of Canada

Cataloguing Branch
Canadian Theses Division

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Direction du catalogage
Division des thèses canadiennes

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF MRS. GASKELL A STUDY IN INDUSTRIALISM AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

by

PHYLLIS ELEANOR BALDWIN

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

HISTORY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1978

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Educational Thought of Mrs. Gaskell, A Study in Industrialism and the Education of Women", submitted by PHYLLIS ELEANOR BALDWIN in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in History of Education.

.....
Supervisor

.....

.....

Date March 29, 1978.....

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with Elizabeth Gaskell's perception of the effects of industrialism on the status and education of women in the mid-nineteenth century, as revealed in her literature and correspondence.

Before proceeding with a study of Mrs. Gaskell's views on the status and education of women in the pre-industrial and industrial society, it was necessary to attempt an over-view of her life and times. Chapter II is concerned with just such an overview.

In Chapter III the status of women in the pre-industrial society is analysed by examining their roles and attitudes and the relation of these to education and society in general. Mrs. Gaskell's girlhood in rural England proves to be of considerable interest and importance in the treatment of this theme.

Chapter IV is concerned with Mrs. Gaskell's perception of the status of women in the new industrial society. Once again the roles and attitudes of women are analysed and these are related to the new educational practices, which in the final analysis are interpreted as a reflection of the values and effects of industrialism. Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal of women in the new order was based on the thirty-three years she lived in Manchester.

She was well received in Victorian middle-class society and she made it her Christian duty to concern herself with the problems of the poor working-class.

Chapter V draws together the argument and major conclusions of this study and attempts to put Mrs. Gaskell and her views on the status and education of women into an historical perspective. It is argued that despite her middle-class biases and inability to make recommendations, Elizabeth Gaskell's contribution to educational history is worthy of attention and the questions which she raised regarding the status and education of women are profound and timely even today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis I am greatly indebted both to Dr. P. Prestwich and to Professor R. Pugh who made useful suggestions and comments. In particular I would like to thank Dr. P. J. Miller who provided invaluable guidance in the direction of the study, and patiently corrected the written text.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	MRS. GASKELL AND HER WORLD	8
III.	WOMEN IN THE OLD ORDER	30
IV.	WOMEN IN THE NEW ORDER	68
V.	CONCLUSION	114
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	131

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present an analysis of the views of Elizabeth Gaskell concerning the changing roles and status of women in the early nineteenth century, and in particular of the relationship of these changes to the new industrial society and to the altered educational provisions for women.

Although there are many studies of Mrs. Gaskell's life and writings, she has not yet been studied as one having significant insights and observations about the education of women. Her documentation of the effects of industrialism is, in certain quarters at least, highly respected[1] but her view of the relationship between the two themes of industrialism and the education of women has not yet been explored. This is not surprising since education is usually a minor theme in Mrs. Gaskell's writing. However careful examination reveals that she has much to say about the formal and informal education of women, and the relation of these processes to

---

[1] See Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1966).

the forces of industrialism.

The particular value of Mrs. Gaskell's writing lies in the fact that so many of her comments and observations are based on personal experience. For example, the grand manners and fine sensibilities which she depicts in such works as Cranford, My Lady Ludlow, "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", and "Morton Hall" are based on her own girlhood experiences in Knutsford, a small town in rural England. Her vivid portrayals of urban life in England's thriving industrial towns, which she depicts in Mary Barton, North and South, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", and "Lizzie Leigh" are scenes which she confronted during her adult life in Manchester. Thus Mrs. Gaskell brings the valuable qualities of personal experience and shrewd observation to enhance her descriptions of life in the old and new orders.

There is in Mrs. Gaskell's writing and correspondence a great awareness of the nineteenth century as a time of transition. Industrialism was transforming society in every conceivable way, politically, socially, economically, and even spiritually. Like many of her generation, Mrs. Gaskell responded to this time of transition by looking back to the pre-industrial society, and lamenting the passing of the old values. In his essay, "The Spirit of the Age" (1831), J.S. Mill's reflections on the nineteenth century are characteristic of Mrs. Gaskell and many others of their generation.

> .... where he asks is the authority
> which commands .... confidence or

> deserves it? Nowhere: and here we see the peculiar inconvenience, of a period of moral and social transition. At all other periods there exists a large body of received doctrine, covering nearly the whole field of moral relations of man, and which no one thinks of questioning, backed as it is by the authority of all, or nearly all persons, supposed to possess knowledge enough to qualify them for giving an opinion on the subject. This state of affairs does not now exist in the civilized world ....[1]

In this thesis, the pre-industrial society will be referred to as the old order. The term old order connotes a rural, agrarian society which was organic and collectivistic in nature, where the emphasis was on the interelation and continuity of human activities, rather than on the separation into spheres of interest. The words old order connote a society which stressed social good over individual rights, and natural human relationships over relationships forged by the 'cash-nexus'. It was a society of clearly defined ranks and orders.

The new order refers to the industrialized society of nineteenth-century England. The term new order connotes a society which is urban, atomistic, and mechanistic in nature. Human activity is fragmented into competing spheres of interest and human society is composed, not of different orders living in harmony, but of competing classes living in conflict. In the new order the stress is on individual rights, and the

---

[1]J.S. Mill, "The Spirit of the Age", 1831, Essays on Politics and Culture, G. Himmelfarb ed., (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962), p. 19.

driving force behind human relationships is the profit motive. The term new order calls forth images of new political, social, economic, and spiritual responses to life. It implies the disintegration of former values and the adoption of new ones.

Complementing the fact that Mrs. Gaskell lived in both the old and new orders is the fact that she was intimately involved with education in each. In the pre-industrial societies of Knutsford and Stratford-Upon-Avon, she received an education which was typical of a girl of her station in life, an education which made her a model of eighteenth-century womanhood. During her life in Manchester, Mrs. Gaskell raised four daughters, and to their educations she devoted a great deal of careful thought and planning. She was highly sensitive to the educational needs of her daughters' generation. Her work in educating her own daughters and in helping establish educational provisions for factory girls made this fact very clear to her. But she was also sensitive to what was faulty and ridiculous in the education of the new generation of women.

Mrs. Gaskell's ideas about the effects of industrialism on the education of women have significant value because, although she was in many respects typical of the middle class, she was not an ideologue. Her writings are therefore free of hyperbole and partisanship. Throughout her life, Mrs. Gaskell was interested in individuals and excluding Christianity, social doctrines and collective social movements held little interest for her.

Finally, in a century in which Western societies are forced to confront and attempt solutions to the 'woman question' Mrs. Gaskell's observations about the impact of industrialism on the lives of women raise some very interesting points. For example, although the 'woman question' was certainly raised before the nineteenth century, Mrs. Gaskell believed that the transition to an industrialized society wreaked particular havoc on society's weakest segments, one of whom was the female portion of the population. In her opinion, in the new industrialized society women had lost the expertise, respect, and authority which they had commanded in the old order. In this society, education, if and when it occurred, only contributed to the atrophy of women's status. Thus Mrs. Gaskell raises the whole question of status for women, what it is comprised of, and how it is secured and maintained. Her ideas provide a valuable backdrop from which to view similar questions today.

One particular problem with Mrs. Gaskell's analysis of industrialism and its effects on the education of women is that it tends to lack a programmatic or prescriptive dimension. Frequently Mrs. Gaskell's perspective makes it difficult if not impossible to offer any solutions to the problems that she perceives.

Another further problem in her analysis of the education of women is that her experience and knowledge are not uniform with regards to the different groups of women in the old and new orders. For example, in the old order she

describes in detail the education of the respectable ladies of the middle order, for that is the education she knew best having experienced it as a young girl. Details regarding the education of aristocratic ladies are quite sparse, as are details of the education of women of the lower orders. In the new order Mrs. Gaskell gives a more even treatment to the theme of education as it relates to respectable middle class girls and poor girls.

As has been mentioned earlier, Mrs. Gaskell has been the subject of considerable analysis, but primarily from a biographical and literary point of view. One very fine biography is Annette Hopkins' Mrs. Gaskell, Her Life and Work, published in 1952. The most recent biography of Mrs. Gaskell is Winifred Gerin's Elizabeth Gaskell, A Biography, which was published in 1976. Like the others, this most recent publication explores her life through her dual roles of wife and artist. From the literary point of view, one of the most recent publications is W.A. Craik's work entitled Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel (1975), which places Mrs. Gaskell in a very respectable literary tradition. Also in 1975, Mrs. Gaskell's writing was the subject of a doctoral study: "Between Two Worlds: A Study of the Heroine in the Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell". Another well known study of Mrs. Gaskell's work, Aina Rubenius' The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works, (1973) examines Mrs. Gaskell and her writing from a more sociological point of view.

While all of these works, particularly the books by Hopkins and Rubenius, have been helpful in this study, none of them focus on the theme of education except in a passing manner. For this reason, the primary sources of Mrs. Gaskell's literature and correspondence are the foundation of this study. Secondary sources have been used for the purpose of locating Mrs. Gaskell and her work in a larger literary and historical perspective. An example of this kind of use of secondary source material is the discussion of Elaine Showalter's typology of women which she presents in her book A Literature of Their Own (1977).

The thesis will proceed with an outline of Mrs. Gaskell's life and times in Chapter II. Chapters III and IV are concerned with Mrs. Gaskell's perception of the old order and new order, and the role and education of women in each. Chapter V offers a conclusion.

CHAPTER II

MRS. GASKELL AND HER WORLD

The keyword for describing English society during Mrs. Gaskell's lifetime, 1810-1865, is transition. The Christian society of rural England, where everyone had his recognized place and function, was being replaced by the liberal, democratic-industrial state, held together by 'self-interest'. Mrs. Gaskell lived in both of these worlds and is one of English literature's most articulate recorders of the great social changes which occurred in this age of transition.

For the first thirteen years of her life, Elizabeth Gaskell, nee Stevenson, lived in Knutsford, a small town which, in the nineteenth century, still retained a medieval quality. Elizabeth's mother, Elizabeth Holland Stevenson, died when Elizabeth was only thirteen months old, and her father, William Stevenson (1772-1829), remarried and continued to live in London, so Elizabeth was sent to Knutsford to live with her mother's sister, Mrs. Hannah Lumb. Excluding the tragic incident of her mother's death, Elizabeth's childhood was exceptionally serene, and the tranquil setting of Knutsford was in her later life a source of peace and beauty, as well as an inspiration for

some of her finest writing.

Elizabeth's family were Unitarians, a sect whose members were distinguished for their devoutness in religion and their belief in education. Thus, Elizabeth received rigorous religious training and at the age of thirteen was sent to a fine boarding school, Avonbank, situated in Stratford-upon-Avon. In her biography of Mrs. Gaskell, Annette Hopkins contrasts Avonbank school with other typical schools of the day:

> Indeed, in a period when schools for girls were distinguished for their inadequacy (it has been said that Thackeray's description of Miss Pinkerton's education establishment in Vanity Fair is no exaggeration). Avonbank could take just pride in its liberal course of study and its modern methods.[1]

Elizabeth's Unitarian heritage, combined with the excellent education she received at Avonbank school, established her lifelong interest in education which found expression in her writing, in her careful guiding of her daughters' educations, and her philanthropic work in Manchester.

Elizabeth Gaskell's youth was spent in the world of the old order. In Knutsford the grand old ways of eighteenth-century England still prevailed. People still subscribed to "the rule of the church and civil government under the rule of king and nobility; the social structure of fixed classes, each

---

[1]A.B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell,(London: John Lehmann, 1952), p. 34.

with its recognized rights and duties; and the economic organization of village agriculture and town guilds."[1] But all this was changing.

The primary cause of the breakdown of the old society was economic. Industrial innovations dated from the eighteenth century, but it was not until the early nineteenth century that the phenomenon of large-scale production greatly altered peoples' lives. The agricultural revolution displaced many people who had formerly made their living tilling small plots of land and industrial development drew these people off the land and relocated them in large towns. Improvements in communications and travel resulted in the traumatic widening of peoples' physical and intellectual horizons. On every front, the old values, beliefs, and ways of doing things were being discarded. Like thousands of others, Elizabeth Gaskell made the great change of moving from a rural setting, Knutsford, to an urban, industrial one, Manchester. The occasion of her move was her marriage to William Gaskell in 1832. As a minister of the Unitarian church, his work took him to one of the many large pockets of population which were forming throughout England.

These large pockets of population, of which Manchester was highly representative, were destitute of all the qualities which made life charming in the old rural society. For the thirty-three years that Mrs. Gaskell lived in Manchester, she never ceased longing for the flowers, the sweet-smelling air,

---

[1]Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p.2.

and the calm and solitude of country life. The transition from country life to urban life was never really successfully accomplished in her mind and heart, and, like many thousands of her generation, the accelerated social change left her feeling disoriented and forever homesick for the old ways. In 1838, after six years in Manchester and the happy arrival of two daughters, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to her friends, William and Mary Howitt, and expressed her longing to return to the country:

> I was brought up in a country town, and my lot is now to live in or rather on the borders of a great manufacturing town, but when spring days first come and the bursting leaves and sweet earthy smells tell me that 'Somer is ycomen in,' I feel a stirring instinct and long to be off into the deep grassy solitudes of the country, just like a bird wakens up from its content at the change of the seasons and tends its way to some well-known but till then forgotten land. But as I happen to be a woman instead of a bird, as I have ties at home and duties to perform, and as, moreover, I have no wings like a dove to fly away, ... why I must stay at home and content myself with recalling the happy scenes which your books bring up before me.
>
> .....
>
> How I wish my dear husband and I could afford to ramble about the country this summer, the sun is shining so brightly. But we are not the richest of the rich (my husband is a Unitarian minister), and, moreover, I have two little girls to watch over.[1]

When Mrs. Gaskell began writing, after the tragic death of her ten-month-old son in 1845, her initial intention was "to

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard, ed. The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p.14.

find a frame-work for her story in some rural scene."[1] But as much as she missed country life, it was urban life which motivated her creative impulse and resulted in her first major work, Mary Barton (1848). The staggering social and political problems in England in the 'hungry forties' are the subject of Mrs. Gaskell's first novel. It was the first novel to present a largely unprejudiced picture of certain aspects of industrial life, and it was joyously received by one faction of the literary and intellectual society of the day. As Annette Hopkins observes in her biography of Mrs. Gaskell, "It is not going too far to say that Mary Barton made the social novel respectable."[2]

Mary Barton was Mrs. Gaskell's response to the major problems and social and political questions of her day. Although she stated in her preface to the novel that she knew "nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade,"[3] she was able to recognize their effects and those she held up to severe scrutiny. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell called attention to the extreme wretchedness of the working classes, the bitter class hatreds, and the great potential for violence, all of which existed in Victorian society. More importantly, she held up for public re-examination the authoritative pronouncements which she believed cruelly sanctified the misery of thousands of workers. In her own gentle, eloquent way,

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 37.

[2]Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell, p. 71.

[3]Gaskell, Mary Barton, p. 38.

Mrs. Gaskell called to account the materialistic demi-gods of the industrial society, those intellectuals such as Adam Smith, Malthus, James Mill and Bentham, who reduced human needs to the laws of the 'invisible hand', geometric and arithmetic progressions, or 'less eligibility'.

Although laissez-faire capitalism was the governing ethos of the nineteenth century, it did not hold unquestioned supremacy. Balancing the materialist doctrines of Adam Smith, Mill and Bentham, was the Christian-humanist tradition, brilliantly represented by John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley, and Tennyson. It was this faction of the English intelligentsia which hailed Mrs. Gaskell after the publication of her first novel. She became friends with Charles Kingsley, whom she referred to as her hero, and Thomas Carlyle. John Ruskin also became a close friend of Mrs. Gaskell. He took considerable interest in her four daughters, and even taught her second-eldest daughter, Margaret, to paint, as he had a very high opinion of the young girl's artistic ability.

In 1849 Charles Dickens wrote to Mrs. Gaskell and, in the most flattering terms, implored her to submit a short story to his new journal, Household Words. Thus began her thirteen-year career of writing for Dickens' journal, a career fraught with periods of mutual satisfaction and mutual annoyance. The first story which she submitted was "Lizzie Leigh" (1849), a tale of Manchester working-class life. In 1850, she submitted stories entitled "The Well of Pen Morfa", "The Heart of John Middleton", and the novelette, The Moorland Cottage. All of

these works, as well as a story published in The Sunday School Penny Magazine in 1849, "Hand and Heart", demonstrate that Mrs. Gaskell subscribed faithfully to the Victorian idea that fiction should be morally improving. The themes of the stories are self-denial for the sake of others, man learning through suffering, and the redeeming effects of the love of a high-minded woman.

Although the writing done in this period does not appear to be of much artistic importance, the themes in it indicate that Mrs. Gaskell was very much in the mainstream of Victorian thought and culture. Her tendency to assume the pulpit in these short stories suggests that she was not immune to the message of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, even if she did not subscribe to its more extreme tenets which stressed hell and sin ad infinitum. As in all other facets of her life, Mrs. Gaskell adopted the moderate approach. Her Evangelicalism was not concerned with theology or doctrine, but found expression in charity and philanthropy, which she stressed in her stories and practised in her own life.

The good works in which Mrs. Gaskell engaged in Manchester were oriented towards helping the poor to improve their lot and survive in the new order. She was always appalled at the extent to which the giving of money was replacing the doing of good deeds, and her own life testified to her belief in the superiority of good works. She taught Sunday school classes for factory girls, and established sewing schools in times of great unemployment in Manchester. She also worked to

reclaim prostitutes and secure passages for poor girls to the New World. All of these efforts stressed action over the passive gesture of contributing money, and suggest a belief in individual rather than social improvement.

Ironically, this Victorian belief in 'improvement' was to prove a great boon to the emerging industrial society. 'Improvement' was a concept which was easily allied to the ethic of work, and the belief in the efficacy of work guaranteed the success of the industrial revolution in England. In The Victorian Frame of Mind, Walter Houghton makes the following observation regarding the alliance between religion and capitalism:

> ... surprising as it may seem, the industrial conception of work included the idea of a mission. Manufacturers and workers, it was often said, were engaged in a vast crusade to subdue nature for the benefit of man and thus to strengthen England and further the progress of civilization .... many a businessman with one eye on making a fortune sincerely imagined that he was also serving a great cause. Mrs. Gaskell, who had studied Manchester at first hand and knew many of its businessmen, created a mill owner who boasted of the personal power he had attained but also called manufacturers like himself "the great pioneers of civilization."[1]

In North and South (1855), Mrs. Gaskell's second great work on the problems of industrialism, she observes that there is something grand and exciting in the interests of the Milton manufacturers, but on the whole she rejected the idea of 'progress' which Houghton states was the culminating idea in the marriage between evangelical religion and capitalism. For

---

[1] Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 250.

example, the Exhibition of 1851, which was acclaimed by all of England as a great tribute to English progress and civilization, elicited only the following brief comment from Mrs. Gaskell in her correspondence. In September 1851 she wrote to Anne Robson, "of course we did the Exhibition. I went three times, and should never care to go again; but then I'm not scientific nor mechanical". [1] It appears that these scientific and mechanical achievements represented very little to Mrs. Gaskell, either in the real or symbolic sense.

Between 1850 and 1853 Mrs. Gaskell produced several more short stories for Household Words, and, most significantly, a serialized publication of Cranford (1853). This novel, regarded by most critics as her best work, drew prodigiously on her childhood memories of Knutsford, and allowed her a little respite from the turbulent sea of controversy which a novel like Mary Barton called forth. Not surprisingly, Cranford was highly admired by those who looked back nostalgically to the traditional society. John Ruskin wrote a letter of praise to Mrs. Gaskell, to which she replied that many of the incidents in Cranford had actually happened:

> ... about Cranford I am so much pleased you like it. It is the only one of my own books that I can read again; - but whenever I am ailing or ill, I take Cranford and - I was going to say, enjoy it! (but that would not be pretty!) laugh over it afresh! And it is true too, for I have seen the cow that wore the grey flannel jacket - and I know the cat that swallowed

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard, ed. The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 159.

> the lace .... I am so glad your mother likedit too! I will tell her a bit more of Cranford that I did not dare to put in, because I thought people would say it was ridiculous, and yet, which really happened in Knutsford![1]

In 1853 the firm of Chapman and Hall published Mrs. Gaskell's second great social or problem novel, Ruth, which dealt with the problem of the unwed mother, or, in Victorian parlance, the 'fallen woman'. In this novel Mrs. Gaskell repudiated the treatment accorded to such women and she did this by showing, in a realistic and unmelodramatic way, the manner in which such mistakes are made. Ruth is a naive, innocent young girl who, at the age of sixteen lives alone in a large city with no family to love and care for her. She works as an apprentice needlewoman and the lonely, arduous nature of her life make her easy prey for the handsome and rich Mr. Bellingham. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Gaskell emphasized that the sin and the person who commits the sin are entirely separate, and that the illegitimate child can be the source of the young mother's rehabilitation rather than, as traditionally believed, a mark and source of further sin and sorrow.

As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Gaskell was deeply involved in various kinds of rescue work for girls, and her novel, Ruth, was a literary expression of a problem which had been engaging her attention for years. But she was not prepared for the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 747.

public reception of her latest work. The novel was subjected to much abuse from society in general as it greatly broke with the traditional treatment of such a theme. Ladies wrote to Mrs. Gaskell stating that after reading such a novel, they would never feel pure again. It was condemned as an unfit subject for fiction and as being offensive in taste. Balancing these extremely negative opinions was the abundant praise of many of Mrs. Gaskell's friends such as Charlotte Bronte, Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler, and Catherine Winkworth. But the mixed reactions to the novel were a source of great grief to Mrs. Gaskell, and in January of 1853 she wrote a long letter to Anne Robson in which she recounted her anxieties:

> You are mistaken about either letter or congratulations. As yet I have had hardly any of the former: indeed I anticipate so much pain from them that in several instances I have forbidden people to write, for their expressions of disapproval, (although I have known that the feeling would exist in them,) would be very painful and stinging at the time. "An unfit subject for fiction' is the thing to say about it; I knew all this before; but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it; only how I shrink with more pain that I can tell you from what people are saying, though I would do every jot of it over again tomorrow. 'Deep regret' is what my friends here... feel and express. In short the only comparison I can find for myself is of St. Sebastian tied to a tree to be shot at with arrows; but I knew it before so it comes upon me as no surprise ....[1]

As the above passage indicates, Mrs. Gaskell was mortified

---

[1] Ibid., p. 220.

at being thought improper or indelicate. In a letter to Miss Fox she wrote "I must be an improper woman without knowing it, I do so manage to shock people."[1]

These reactions to the novel, Ruth, indicated the conflicting attitudes that existed regarding the status of women in Victorian society. The legal and civil rights of women were an inheritance from the eighteenth century, and this traditional view of women's role was endorsed by the majority of the population. During the nineteenth century, however, there were many critical appraisers of women's lot, and they began advocating reforms. In that Mrs. Gaskell had the courage to write a novel like Ruth, she belongs with those courageous women of the early mid-nineteenth century, Mary Carpenter, the Winkworth sisters in Manchester, Josephine Butler in Liverpool, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, an English woman enjoyed the same rights as a man only as long as she remained single. But in a society which had no careers open to women except marriage, to be single was to be a failure. Woman's 'mission' was to be a wife and mother, and as a wife her existence as an independent individual was not recognized in English law. "She could neither own property, nor make a will, and any goods she possessed belonged ... automatically to her husband. If she earned anything by her own work it was not hers to enjoy .... She could not give evidence against her

---

[1] Ibid., p. 223.

husband, even in cases of assault upn her person....[1] It was not until 1839 that a law regarding the Custody of Infants was passed which empowered a judge to grant a woman custody of her own children.

All these laws were reckoned to be in a woman's best interests, which, it was thought, were best represented by her husband acting wisely on her behalf. The law of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thus reflected the belief that a woman should be grateful that a man had accepted responsibility for her.

> A married man, it was argued, bore a heavy burden; he was forced to support his wife as long as she shared his bed and board; he was in many cases answerable for her actions; he could not ill-use her or shut her up ... and although her property was accounted his, he could not will away her personal jewels; if he wanted to dispose of them he must do so in his lifetime.[2]

Although voices of protest regarding the rights of women were heard as early as 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft published A Vindication of the Rights of Women, it was not until 1848 that a true Women's Rights Movement was formed, and it was formed in America. However, in England the question of women's rights was hotly debated and many tracts were written, the most impressive one being J. S. Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869).

---

[1] I.B. O'Malley, Women in Subjection, (London: Duckworth, 1933), p. 23.

[2] Ibid., p. 17.

Mrs. Gaskell was very much a product of her time in that she was deeply concerned with the woman question. But although her views were more enlightened than those of the average Victorian, she was by no means a feminist. As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Gaskell was a 'moderate' by temperament. For instance, she did not rally around such causes as the Married Woman's Property Act which she was asked to sign in 1856. She signed it reluctantly stating that she did not see the point of it.[1] Although she believed in education for women, she drew the line at opening up to women what she considered to be more masculine fields of endeavour such as medicine. In her correspondence she stated that she

> would not trust a mouse to a woman if a man's judgement was to be had. Women have no judgement. They've tact, and sensitiveness and genius, and hundreds of fine and lovely qualities, but are at best angelic geese as to matters requiring serious and long scientific consideration. I'm not a friend to Female Medical Education.[2]

What Mrs. Gaskell did speak out against in Ruth was the old 'double standard' in sexual ethics. In Ruth, as in "Lizzie Leigh" and Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell depicts how the woman was always made to answer for any sexual indiscretion, how she was branded 'fallen' and cast out of society, and how the man was never held to account for his actions. Mrs. Gaskell also refused to view the illegitimate child as a curse,

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard, ed., Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 379.

[2] Ibid., p. 419

but instead saw it as a possible source of the mother's redemption.

With regards to women's education, Mrs. Gaskell's attitude was again enlightened without being extreme. She was a devoted mother who followed her daughters' development with deep interest, and planned their educations with a great deal of effort. But in Mrs. Gaskell's opinion, intellectual schooling was always of secondary importance to that of training the will and instilling the correct attitudes. In 1853, in a letter to Miss Fox, she made the following comment regarding the priorities for the education of her third daughter, Florence: "I don't know (or care) a straw about lessons."[1] In another letter written in 1845 she passed on some advice to a friend, Elizabeth Holland, regarding children's education. She simply said, "Don't kill your children with lessons."[2] Again in March of 1838, in the Diary which recorded the development of her oldest daughter, Marianne, Mrs. Gaskell wrote of her plan to send the child to an infant's school, "not to advance her rapidly in any branch of learning, for William and I agree in not caring for this; but to perfect her habits of obedience, to give her an idea of conquering difficulties by perseverance."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 253.

[2] Ibid., p. 825.

[3] Elizabeth Gaskell, My Diary, The Early Years of My Daughter Marianne, quoted in Aina Rubenius, The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Work, (Uppsala: Kraus Reprint, 1973), p. 103.

These comments emphasize Mrs. Gaskell's belief that intellectual knowledge and fine accomplishments were desirable only after the child had received suitable training, for after her own daughters had received such training they pursued very intense academic and artistic educations. But, as illustrated by a letter written to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth in 1854, Mrs. Gaskell never hesitated to state which facet of a girl's education was most necessary and important. She wrote,

> It seems to me so very desirable to surround an orphan with something of the love and duties of a home, to place her as nearly as possible in the relation of a daughter, and to secure for her the nearest approach to the domestic relationships of which she has been deprived, that I think I should consider this education of the affections, and the domestic duties that arise out of them, as more than an equivalent for the accomplishments and languages which she would learn by the other plan, and the superior station in society which a governess may assume.[1]

The training of the will and instilling of the correct feminine attitudes were duly accomplished in the four Gaskell daughters and on that foundation their subsequent educations were laid. They studied languages, ancient and modern, music, mathematics, dancing, drawing, and painting. Indeed, at one time Mrs. Gaskell feared that her daughters' fine educations were barriers to their securing husbands, the main goal in life

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 268.

for Victorian women. She wrote,

> I don't know what I should do if anyone of them married; and yet it is constantly a wonder to me that no one ever gives them a chance. I suspect it is that here (in Manchester) the Unitarian young men are either good and uncultivated, or else rich and regardless of those higher qualities, the 'spiritual' qualities as it were, which those must appreciate who would think of my girls.[1]

The question of education for Victorian women was closely allied to the question of work. Mrs. Gaskell gave priority to the training dimension of women's education because she believed that women's primary task was to assume the "natural duties"[2] of being a wife and mother, and that these duties had claim over all others. In her own life she experienced the conflicting demands between her domestic role and her art, and she consistently gave priority to her domestic responsibilities. In 1850 in a letter to Eliza Fox, she observed, "one thing is pretty clear, women must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life. However we are talking of women."[3]

Mrs. Gaskell's more progressive attitude regarding women's work, one which was certainly not held by Victorians

---

[1] Ibid., p. 598.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

[3] Ibid., p. 106.

in general, applied to maiden ladies who had no natural duties. In such cases Mrs. Gaskell believed that they should find some other duties to render their lives meaningful. She reflected on this problem in a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth in 1850, saying, "Everyday I see how women, deprived of their natural duties as wives and mothers, must look out for other duties if they wish to be at peace."[1] In keeping with this thinking Mrs. Gaskell had a deep admiration for Florence Nightingale, whom she described as "a saint"[2] whereas the women in opposition to Miss Nightingale and her work she dismissed as "stupid creatures."[3] Mrs. Gaskell's respect for Miss Nightingale's work is also indicated by her telling Margaret, her second-eldest daughter who never married, that she could prepare for a career in nursing when she reached thirty.

In 1857 Smith, Elder and Company published Mrs. Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë, and once again Elizabeth was the center of controversy in the literary and intellectual circles of Victorian England. In her work she drew a picture of Charlotte which was always sympathetic but not uncritical. Also, by Victorian standards she was exceedingly candid about such things as Branwell Brontë's flirtation with Mrs. Edmund Robinson, as well as the unhappy experiences of the Brontë

---

[1] Ibid., p. 117.

[2] Ibid., p. 306.

[3] Ibid., p. 382.

children at the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. All these things elicited much condemnation from reviewers and the reading public. Today, however, The Life of Charlotte Brontë is regarded as one of the most satisfactory biographies in English literature and certainly as the best biography of Charlotte Brontë.

The remaining seven years of Mrs. Gaskell's life were marked by the publication of works which steered clear of controversy and problems. The significant works published between 1858 and 1865 were My Lady Ludlow, A Dark Night's Work, Cousin Phillis, Sylvia's Lovers, and Wives and Daughters. The novel Wives and Daughters is regarded as one of Mrs. Gaskell's crowning achievements although she died before it was completed.

Mrs. Gaskell's life and achievements epitomize the character of the age in which she lived. Like other writers in early Victorian society, she enjoyed the vantage point of remembering the old traditional society and yet fully experiencing the new industrial way of life. This unique historical position of her generation enabled her to reflect upon the transition which was taking place, and to evaluate it in terms of what had gone before. Her own life was a continual effort to adapt to the urban way of living, and her writing testifies to the force of impact which the great social questions of the day had on the consciousness of her generation. Victorian England, like Mrs. Gaskell's writing, was characterized by its earnest attempt to comprehend and handle social change, as well as by its need to look to the past for tested standards

and some respite from turbulence. To live in an age of transition meant to experience the uncertainty of the future and the loss of the past. As Walter Houghton observes, the Victorians "had to live in the meantime between two worlds, one dead or dying, one struggling but powerless to be born, in a age of doubt."[1]

This sense of living in two worlds is one of the primary themes of Mrs. Gaskell's fiction. In her stories set in the old order, there is a strong air of nostalgia combined with oblique references to forces of modernization which are lurking in the shadows. An example of this is the mention of "that horrid cotton trade"[2] in Cranford, something which the Cranford ladies know nothing about first hand, but which they have heard exists in the outside world. In her stories of the new order, or industrialized world, there are frequent references to the way life used to be or the way life was before the migration to the city. The most obvious example of this is the novel North and South in which the Hale family leaves the quiet of southern England and migrates to the northern industrial town of Milton.

Mrs. Gaskell was the model Victorian lady and her interests were thus primarily in women and womanly things. This is not to say that she did not enjoy men; indeed, she once remarked in a letter to Catherine Winkworth, "I wish I could

---

[1]Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 10.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford,(New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 74.

help taking to men so much more than to women ... and I wish I could help men taking to me ...."[1] But throughout her fiction and correspondence there is a definite delight and enthusiasm for the traditional feminine concerns of love, marriage, children, dress, cookery, and propriety. Mrs. Gaskell had a considerable reputation as a 'match-maker', as well as being a trainer of excellent servants. Her correspondence is replete with comments about dress and other aspects of fashion. Therefore, when Mrs. Gaskell extended her energies outside the confines of her Victorian home, it is not surprising that she addressed herself, in her philanthropic work and in her literature, to the subject about which she knew most - women.

Mrs. Gaskell's exploration of the displacement of women in the new order and its effects on their world touches on all the great social questions of the nineteenth century. It relates to the effects of industrialization, the impact of materialist-utilitarian doctrine, the influence of Evangelicalism, the effects of the Poor Law Reform of 1834, the rise of Chartism, and the beginnings of the suffrage movement. Although these issues caused Mrs. Gaskell to look to the past with a sense of nostalgia, she still confronted the modern world in an eminently sensible and practical manner. Her analysis of modern life suggests that she was a woman who though not profound in erudition, possessed the wisdom that

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 808.

comes from a sensitive and intelligent interaction with one's society.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN IN THE OLD ORDER

Elizabeth Gaskell was well qualified to comment on the position of women in the old order. She was born in London in 1810, but at the early age of fourteen months she was taken to the rural town of Knutsford to be raised by her deceased mother's sister, Mrs. Hannah Lumb. Knutsford was situated sixteen miles from Manchester and remained unspoiled by industrialism and other forces of modernization. It was still tucked away in the old world, and it was in Knutsford, during her childhood, that Elizabeth Gaskell experienced the old traditional way of life. Her stories about small-town life drew heavily on her childhood experiences. In her fiction, Knutsford was recreated as Dunscombe in "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", Hollingford in Wives and Daughters, and was finally immortalized as Cranford.

It is as a spokesman for the respectable women of the middle orders that Mrs. Gaskell was best qualified. Aunt Lumb maintained a fine spacious house on the edge of town and it was there that Elizabeth grew up and experienced those pastimes which were typical of a young girl of her rank. She was indulged in pretty bonnets and dresses, an interest which

she retained all her life. Aunt Lumb educated her niece in the niceties of cooking and sewing and the art of running a house. Elizabeth taught Sunday school at the Unitarian Church and during the week attended the usual round of garden and tea parties. Mrs. Lumb kept her own cow, poultry, ducks, and geese, and Elizabeth delighted in tending these creatures. Along with a respectable dose of religious training, Elizabeth received a fine boarding school education, quite remarkable for its day. By the time of her marriage to William Gaskell in 1832, Elizabeth had evolved into what might be termed the ideal woman of the old order. She had beauty, good breeding, a vivacious and sociable disposition, an enlightened mind, and a gentle submissive nature. In many respects, her heroines of the old order were modelled on her own experiences and development.

Life in Knutsford exposed Elizabeth to the other orders in the old society, but her contact with them was essentially that of an observer. Knutsford's Saturday market, to which the surrounding farmers brought their produce, afforded Elizabeth an excellent opportunity to meet and observe the local farmers and their wives. These experiences, plus the unlimited opportunities for walks in the country, acquainted her with the charms of country life and the ways of country people, and enabled her to write knowingly about farm life in such books as Sylvia's Lovers and Cousin Phillis, and in short stories such as "Lizzie Leigh", "Morton Hall", and "The Well of Pen Morfa". But in the final analysis, Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions of farm life and farm people are the

descriptions of an outsider looking in, but not truly belonging. Elizabeth Gaskell was an inhabitant of the small town, and for this reason she did not fathom the harsher realities of farm life, the loneliness caused by isolation, the hard times due to crop failures, and the drudge labour. In many respects, Mrs. Robson in Sylvia's Lovers, and Nest Gwyn in "The Well of Pen Morfa", are transplanted characters from the middle orders. They are extremely clean and feminine, evidencing none of the roughness associated with hard farm work. The lives of Mrs. Gaskell's women of the farming class tend therefore to be somewhat romanticized.

In her depiction of aristocratic ladies of the old order, Mrs. Gaskell maintains a sense of distance. Her aristocratic ladies are not drawn with the assured intimacy and detail of her female characters of the middle orders. In Knutsford, Elizabeth would have known who the local aristocrats were, but there is no record of her having had any close associations with them. Also, her membership in the Unitarian church would have made her association with the aristocracy on a social level extremely unlikely. Her knowledge of the aristocracy was thus limited to distant glimpses. Nevertheless, she possessed both an understanding of and sympathy for its place and role in society, and this is reflected in her fiction and correspondence. To her American friend, Charles Eliot Norton, Mrs. Gaskell wrote in 1858, "I don't believe from what I hear of your looks, that

a Republic agrees with your health; do try a little aristocracy ... try a visit to us who are admirers of that 'effete institution'.[1]

Thus whereas Mrs. Gaskell's depictions of the women of the middle orders are her forte, her depictions of the lives of aristocractic women and poor women suffer certain limitations. But these limitations do not disqualify her total view of women's place and role in the old order, for it is a view based on an intimate knowledge of the social structure. Mrs. Gaskell's sympathy and respect for the role of women in the old order was ultimately a sympathy and preference for the society that made such a role possible, and that society she understood very well. Mrs. Gaskell loved the way of life in the old society for she believed that it made possible the existence of the virtuous woman.

For Mrs. Gaskell respectable women included members of the aristocracy, country gentry, or middle orders of society, and their primary function in the old order was to be good wives and mothers. Mrs. Gaskell referred to these roles as women's "natural duties."[2]

For a respectable woman to be a good wife, her first duty, whether she was an aristocrat or of the middle orders, was to give the proper wifely obedience, respect, and loyalty to her husband. Many of Mrs. Gaskell's female characters are

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 515.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

more clever or morally upright than their husbands, but their respect for their husbands' authority is presented as the ultimate tribute to their womanliness.

An example of wifely loyalty is found in My Lady Ludlow. Lord Ludlow was not the most prudent man during his lifetime. He incurred large debts and Mrs. Gaskell even hints that he had qualities of the wastrel in him; but Lady Ludlow does her duty and remembers him with proper respect. Mrs. Gaskell observes that"the late lord had been a sailor, and had been as extravagant in his habits as most sailors are ... but whatever he was, my lady loved him and his memory with about as fond and proud a love as ever wife gave husband, I should think."[1]

In "Crowley Castle" and Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gaskell presents two more examples of wifely obedience and loyalty. Theresa Crowley remains in her husband's house and submits to his will even after he robs her jewel box and abuses her person. Mrs. Hamley in Wives and Daughters, an educated and sociable woman, silently endures all the faults of her husband, Squire Hamley, a man unequal to his wife in almost every way.

> He was imperfectly educated, and ignorant of many points; but he was aware of his deficiency and regretted it in theory. He was awkward and ungainly in society, and so kept out of it as much as possible; and he was obstinate,

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow,(New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 51.

violent-tempered, and dictatorial
in his own immediate circle.[1]

Mrs. Gaskell believed that many respectable women in the old order had husbands who were immoral, imprudent, cruel, or ill-bred; nevertheless their wives owed them unquestioning obedience and loyalty. Duty, not marital happiness, was the ultimate criterion by which a wife was judged, and Mrs. Gaskell believed that the women of the old order measured well when judged by this standard. In a letter to her eldest daughter, Marianne, in 1854, Mrs. Gaskell expressed the belief that it is unprofitable and slightly irreverent for a woman to dwell on domestic unhappiness. "Everybody has their home troubles, but the best way in general is hardly to acknowledge them even to oneself, much less make them the subject of conversation with others, out of the house especially."[2]

Mrs. Gaskell believed that, depending on her station in life, the respectable woman in the old order was always busy with various tasks. Firstly, she had domestic duties. For the aristocratic lady, domestic duties were of a more supervisory nature, as the household was often very large and there were many servants to direct and maintain. In My Lady Ludlow, the eponymous heroine's duties go beyond the immediate household and extend to the administering of

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 51.

[2]J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 861.

the affairs of Hanbury estate: "My lady was never idle. For one thing, she had to superintend the agent for the large Hanbury estate. I believe it was mortgaged ... but she was anxious to pay off this before her death."[1] Lady Ludlow also makes "herself at liberty to see her tenants from four to six in the afternoon,"[2] and afterwards she invites them to a supper in the servants' hall.

> The outlying tenants always had a supper for them in the servants' hall on Thursday, to which, indeed, all comers were welcome to sit down .... They had as much beer as they could drink while they were eating, and, when the food was cleared away, they had a cup a piece of good ale ....[3]

Because Lady Ludlow's husband is deceased, her domestic duties are very broad in nature, for upon his death she assumed the responsibilities which once he carried. It is Mrs. Gaskell's observation that Lady Ludlow executes her new responsibilities with pride, determination, and a good deal of ability:

> My Lord, her son, was ambassador at some foreign place, and very proud we all were of his glory and dignity; but I fancy it cost money, and my lady would have lived upon bread and water sooner than have called upon him to help her in paying off the mortgage ....[4]

Another domestic duty of the aristocractic lady was

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 49.

[2] Ibid., p. 49.

[3] Ibid., p. 50.

[4] Ibid., p. 51.

to arrange suitable marriages for her children. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gaskell describes the relief of Lady Cumnor who succeeds in finding husbands for her two eldest daughters and thus has only one daughter left to settle in marriage.

> Lady Cumnor, having married her two eldest daughters, found her labours as chaperon to Lady Harriet, the youngest, considerably lightened by co-operation; and, at length, she had leisure to be an invalid ... after a long course of dinners, late hours, and London atmosphere ... she betook herself to the comparative quiet of the Towers ....[1]

While the aristocratic lady of the old order had a definite domestic role to fill, Mrs. Gaskell believed that she also played a very important social and political role. In the rural communities, it was the local aristocratic lady who established a school. The school which Lady Cumnor establishes in Wives and Daughters is an industrial school "... where girls are taught to sew beautifully, to be capital housemaids, and pretty fair cooks, and above all, to dress neatly in a kind of charity uniform devised by the ladies of Cumnor Towers ... curtseys and "please ma'ams" being de rigueur."[2] The school which Lady Ludlow establishes is also a school of industry to teach girls to spin and knit. If

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 100.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

the girls spin and knit diligently, they are favoured with instruction in reading. These schools testified to the aristocractic lady's benevolence and sense of social responsibility, but they were also indicative of her political role. For example, it was she who determined the curriculum of the school. The forementioned industrial schools of Lady Cumnor and Lady Ludlow train young girls for their station in life and do not aspire to raise them above it. Lady Ludlow is fully cognizant of the political implications of teaching the lower orders to read and write, and like others of her rank realizes that such education would be the death toll of the old order:

> .... education is a bad thing, if given indiscriminately. It unfits the lower orders for their duties to which they are called by God; of submission to those placed in authority over them; of contentment with the state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, and of ordering themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters.[1]

The social role of Mrs. Gaskell's aristocratic ladies also extended to giving aid and advice to those who were in need of it. One of Lady Ludlow's charitable acts is to maintain and educate six young gentlewomen in her own household. In the following passage, Margaret Dawson explains how she came to live in Lady Ludlow's house: "And so it fell out, that when my poor father died, and mother was sorely pressed to know what to do with her nine children, and looked far

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 149.

and wide for signs of willingness to help, Lady Ludlow sent her a letter proffering aid and assistance."[1] This aid and assistance Lady Ludlow explains as her "duty as a Christian lady."[2]

Mrs. Gaskell believed that it was the ladies among the aristocracy who fulfilled the conservative, social-political function of maintaining standards in society. In Wives and Daughters, Lord Cumnor rides out on his horse and visits familiarly with all the local people. It is Lady Cumnor who makes up for "this weakness of the earl's" with her "unapproachable dignity",[3] and thus preserves the differences of rank on which the old order was based. Lady Ludlow also conducts herself in a manner which commands respect. Margaret Dawson, one of the young gentlewomen in Lady Ludlow's household, reports that while living with Lady Ludlow, "now and then we rode out with her in her coach and four. She did not like to go out with a pair of horses, considering this rather beneath her rank ...."[4] Lady Ludlow and Lady Cumnor do not tolerate behavior which erodes the political foundation of society. They insist that differences in rank be respected and maintained. When Mrs. Gibson, the doctor's wife in Wives and Daughters, goes to Cumnor Towers

---

[1] Ibid., p. 10.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 4.

[4] Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 28.

in a flashy silk gown, Lady Cumnor reprimands her for "the folly of ... dressing above her station."[1]

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, Mrs. Gaskell believed that the aristocratic lady lived a full and useful existence. Her life was permeated with domestic, social, and political concerns, all of which were part of the aristocratic lady's role. But there was one other aspect of the aristocratic lady's role, and that was her cultivation of the habits of refinement and delicacy. That is, the role of the lady dictated that she must be certain things as well as do things.

A refined lady in the old order always had control of her feelings. Emotional indulgence was considered vulgar and undignified and unfitted to anyone of rank. Margaret Dawson in My Lady Ludlow observes, "My lady rarely spoke out her feelings. For, to begin with, she was of rank: and I have heard her say that people of rank do not talk about their feelings except to their equals, and even to them they conceal them, except upon rare occasions."[2] Lady Cumnor in Wives and Daughters never complains or seeks sympathy when she is ill. She suffers in stoic silence and mentions her pain to no one. Another example of controlled sensibility is Theresa Crowley in "Crowley Castle". Theresa never informs her father of her cruel suffering at the hands of her

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 625.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 45.

husband, the French Count. Her aristocratic pride and sense of dignity dictate that she suffer silently. Mrs. Gaskell believed that this controlled sensibility which demanded both courage and strength of character very much enhanced the dignity of the aristocratic lady.

A refined lady had a delicate constitution. Bustling good health was regarded as unfeminine and therefore no lady would boast of such a thing. Lady Ludlow uses a cane to create an appearance of delicate health even though she has no real need of it. As Margaret Dawson observes, Lady Ludlow "always walked quickly when she did not bethink herself of her cane ...."[1] Lady Cumnor is described by Mrs. Gaskell as having the leisure to become an invalid.

Accompanying this belief in the delicacy of a lady's health was the belief in the delicacy of a lady's appetite. Lady Ludlow sets a fine table, but she consumes only a dish of milk and some bread. She serves tea in small china cups accompanied by a plate of delicately-cut bread and butter.

Mrs. Gaskell saw the doctrine of refinement and delicacy as affecting the most minute areas of a lady's life. In My Lady Ludlow the eponymous heroine even believes that certain scents are indelicate and should be avoided by cultivated people:

> The choice of odours was what my lady piqued herself upon, saying nothing showed birth like a keen susceptibility of smell ... her opinion on the subject was believed

---

[1] Ibid., p. 30.

> to be that no scent derived from any animal could ever be of sufficiently pure nature to give pleasure to any person of good family ....[1]

The refined lady of the old order also had pretty pleasing ways which made her a charming hostess and a delightful companion to her husband. She was able to make pleasant conversation about interesting subjects. In "Crowley Castle", Mrs. Gaskell describes disapprovingly the wife whose interests extend no further than the hearth. Bessy Hawtrey marries Marmaduk Brownlow, an extremely intelligent man who is keenly interested in Parliament and local government. But Bessy is unable to talk intelligently about such things, and, in Mrs. Gaskell's opinion, Bessy's "sluggish interest in all things beyond her immediate ken"[2] is a great detriment to her success as a wife.

Mrs. Gaskell admired very much the refinement and sense of delicacy of the aristocratic ladies in the old order. To anyone who knew the difference, more common ways were annoying and embarrassing. In Wives and Daughters, Molly Gibson's awareness of the difference is very much Mrs. Gaskell's awareness. After Molly's stay at Squire Hamley's, during which time she is exposed to Mrs. Hamley's good breeding and genteel ways, her few days visit with the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 30.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Crowley Castle", Cousin Phillis, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 51.

Browning sisters provides a startling contrast between Mrs. Hamley's refinement and the coarser ways of less august ladies.

> Molly, too, felt the change of atmosphere keenly; and she blamed herself for so feeling even more keenly. But she could not help having a sense of refinement, which had made her appreciate the whole manner of being at the Hall. By her dear old friends the Miss Brownings she was petted and caressed so much that she became ashamed of noticing the coarser and louder tones in which they spoke, the provincialism of their pronunciation, and the absence of interest in things, and their greediness of details about persons.[1]

Lack of tone or refinement was something which Mrs. Gaskell could not abide.

In summary, the role of the aristocratic lady in the old order was one which combined competence and refinement. The work of the aristocratic lady was more properly expressed by the word duties, which denoted moral obligations and social and domestic responsibilities. Accompanying the lady's "natural duties" and domestic concerns of running a large household were the wider social concerns of providing intellectual leadership regarding such matters as education, providing patronage, and generally directing the ordered running of the old paternalistic society. Her ladyship's duties were executed competently and with a sense of charm

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 168.

which the code of refinement made possible. Mrs. Gaskell believed that the aristocratic ladies of the old order were very special. Regretfully, she was forced to include,"... you will never meet with a Lady Ludlow in these days."[1]

The role of the respectable women of the middle orders was not so grand as that of the aristocratic ladies. Because they did not possess great wealth, their sphere of influence seldom extended beyond the home. Mrs. Gaskell perceived the role of these ladies of the middle orders as emphasizing primarily domestic duties and refinement.

The domestic duties included all the niceties of keeping a house, plus performing many of the tasks which, in aristocratic circles, a servant would have performed. The young gentlewomen in Lady Ludlow's household darn stockings, table linens, and old lace, as well as prepare bottles of physic out of such harmless ingredients as bread. Another task of the young gentlewomen is baking the cakes and dishes of the season which grace Lady Ludlow's tables. Margaret Dawson provides a complete list of the dishes she learned to prepare while at Lady Ludlow's:

> Then we learnt to make all the cakes and dishes of the season in the still-room. We had plum-porridge and mince-pies at Christmas, fritters and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, fumenty on Mothering Sunday, violet cakes in Passion Week,

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 9.

Tansy-pudding on Easter Sunday, and
so on through the year ....[1]

Gentlewomen whose fathers had died and left them only a small competency to live upon directed much of their time and energy to practising 'genteel economy.' Mrs. Gaskell adressed a good deal of attention to such decayed gentlewomen. Living on the verge of poverty, these gentlewomen elicited Mrs. Gaskell's sympathy and admiration as they struggled to maintain their respectability. Miss Galindo in My Lady Ludlow is such a gentlewoman. She is known in the village for a great strictness of economy and for her many ingenious ways of saving money. To save pennies she employs the most undesirable maids. Margaret Dawson, in describing Miss Galindo's servants and maids, observes that "... this servant was invariably chosen because she had some infirmity that made her undesirable to everyone else. I believe Miss Galindo had had lame and blind and hump-backed maids."[2] Like Miss Matty in Cranford, many of the respectable ladies spent their evenings alone in dark rooms and lit candles only when callers came to their doors. In Wives and Daughters, the Miss Brownings save money by purchasing two kinds of tea; one modestly expensive tea to serve to company and one inexpensive tea to drink while alone.

Because of the penury of many of the ladies of the respectable order, some of them went outside the home and

---

[1] Ibid., p. 28.

[2] Ibid., p. 219.

found polite employment to augment their incomes. But this was a very dangerous solution, for if a lady did any task below her dignity and station, she quickly lost her respectability. Miss Galindo, the decayed gentlewoman in My Lady Ludlow, is very fortunate for she is chosen by the wealthy ladies of the community to manage the local repository. This is a very respectable job. As Mrs. Gaskell explains,

> It was the custom in those days for the wealthy ladies of the community to set on foot a repository .... The ostensible manager of this repository was generally a decayed gentlewoman .... She was controlled by a committee of ladies; and paid by them in proportion to the amount of goods she sold ....
>
> .....
>
> ... there was a great variety of articles, of whose unusual excellence every one might judge. Such fine sewing, and stitching, and buttonholing. Such bundles of soft delicate knitted stockings ....[1]

Besides these forementioned domestic duties of maintaining a home and practising genteel economy, the ladies of the middle orders were expected to render any possible service to the lord or lady of the manor. In Wives and Daughters, Lady Cumnor asks the ladies of Hollingford to look after the school she has started when her ladyship goes to London. The ladies of Hollingford are only too honoured to be of service: "The various un-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 130.

occupied gentlewomen of the town responded to the call of their liege lady, and gave her their service as required; and, along with it, a great deal of whispered and fussy admiration."[1] In My Lady Ludlow, Miss Galindo is delighted with the opportunity to be of service to the lady of Hanbury estate. Lady Ludlow asks Miss Galindo to serve as Mr. Horner's clerk, and Miss Galindo expresses her willingness to perform this duty in the following hyperbolic fashion: "If Lady Ludlow ever honours me by asking for my right hand, I'll cut it off, and wrap the stump up so tidily she shall never find out it bleeds."[2]

Because of their station in society, the respectable ladies of the middle orders regarded it as their duty to give good advice to the poor and ignorant. In "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", Miss Tomkinson lectures Mrs. Brouncker, the gardener's wife, on the importance of cleanliness and domestic economy: "'What is this close smell?' asked she. 'I'm afraid you are not cleanly. Cheese! - cheese in this cupboard! No wonder there is an unpleasant smell.' 'Fresh butter, I declare! Well now, Mrs. Brouncker .... How can you save, indeed with such extravagance!"[3] In Cranford, Miss Deborah Jenkyns lectures the postman on the impropriety of having

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 4.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 140.

[3]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", My Lady Ludlow,(New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 457.

too many children. While Mrs. Gaskell regarded this determination by such ladies to instruct their inferiors as being somewhat amusing, she realized that it was founded on a real sense of duty and responsibility.

The cultural pastimes of these respectable ladies included letter writing, gardening, arranging flowers, sketching, attending tea parties, frequenting the milliner's shop, and gossiping, and of all these activities, the last was probably most assiduously attended to. In the first chapter of Cranford, Mrs. Gaskell provides a detailed account of the activities of these respectable ladies.

> For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them; for frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers through the railings; for rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture into the gardens if the gates are left open; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling ourselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish; for keeping their neat maid-servants in admirable order; for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress, the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient.[1]

As in the case of the aristocratic ladies, the ladies of the middle orders gave a great deal of attention to matters of refinement and delicacy. Mrs. Gaskell perceived

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 1.

these ladies as cultivating refinement to an almost comical degree. She believed that this was the result of their concern to remain respectable in the face of economic difficulties. For this reason, the refinement of the ladies of the middle orders was hyperbolic in nature. As did the aristocratic ladies, they stressed controlled sensibility, restrained appetite, delicate health, and social graces.

In her detailed attention to the lives of widows and maiden ladies, Mrs. Gaskell explored the widest parameters of the respectable lady's role. Singleness, in a society which conceived of only one role for women, resulted in the excessive cultivation of the other qualities of femininity as a kind of over-compensation. This hyperbolic expression of femininity allowed Mrs. Gaskell to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the respectable lady's role.

In Mrs. Gaskell's view, the role of the respectable ladies of the middle orders was full and satisfying provided that the important state of matrimony was achieved. The lady then had "natural duties", domestic duties, social duties, and civilized cultural pastimes. All these activities were to be executed with the charm and delicacy which the lady's refinement dictated. In the case of the single lady, the absence of "natural duties" resulted in her directing much more energy into other areas. Thus it is Mrs. Gaskell's single ladies who are the supreme needlewomen, as is Miss

Galindo in My Lady Ludlow. Miss Deborah Jenkyns in Cranford is respected as an authority on propriety and refinement, as well as for being a writer of fine letters. Miss Galindo and Miss Jenkyns are also competent businesswomen. Miss Galindo fulfills her role as Mr. Horner's clerk with zeal and perfection, and Miss Jenkyns invests her money with considerable knowledge and skill.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that the essence of the respectable lady's role was competence tempered by refinement. Although she delighted in the over-all competence with which they conducted their lives, it was their gentle, refined sensibilities and their fundamental goodness that she loved. At the conclusion of Cranford, Mrs. Gaskell makes a statement about Miss Matty which is the basis of her respect for all the ladies of the middle orders: "We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us."[1]

In Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë, Mr. Brontë asks his daughter Charlotte, "What is the best mode of education for a woman?" and Charlotte replies, "That which would make her rule her house well."[2] The education of respectable women in the old order was directed to this end. There were minor variations in the kinds of experiences given to an aristocratic lady and a gentlewoman, but these variations were more a function of the woman's rank than a

---

[1] Ibid., p. 192.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 94.

reflection of any philosophical difference.

In Mrs. Gaskell's fiction there is not a great deal of detail concerning the aristocratic lady's formal education. Mrs. Gaskell did not frequent aristocratic society, and therefore did not pretend to fathom all its views. But throughout My Lady Ludlow the few details about Lady Ludlow's work and pleasures lead one to believe that she had had rigorous instruction in reading, writing, and casting accounts. Mrs. Gaskell states that Lady Ludlow is more "apt to think than to talk"[1], and that she is a "pretty good woman of business."[2] After Lord Ludlow's death, Lady Ludlow assumes all the responsibilities for the management of Hanbury estate and manages quite well.

Another indication that Lady Ludlow had received a sound education is her habit of reading and rereading Bacon's Essays: "Bacon's Essays was one of the few books that lay about in my Lady's room: and, if you took it up and opened it carelessly, it was sure to fall apart at his "Essay on Gardens."[3] In her library are 'improving' books and journals, Mr. Addison's "Spectator", Sturm's Reflections, Mrs. Chapone's Letters, and Dr. Gregory's Advice to Young Ladies. Lady Ludlow also appears to be well versed in the old families of England and royal lineage.

The books in Lady Ludlow's library tell a good deal

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 174.

[2]Ibid., p. 174.

[3]Ibid., p. 47.

about one aspect of her education, that part dealing specifically with womanhood. Mrs. Chapone's Letters and Dr. Gregory's Advice to Young Ladies[1] were standard works of the eighteenth century for the education of young ladies. Both books preached the doctrine of delicacy and propriety for women. Mrs. Chapone, who was a "blue-stocking", was a little more liberal than Dr. Gregory. She asserted the right of women to acquire knowledge, provided that they did not make a display of it. Dr. Gregory, on the other hand, was extremely conservative and counselled women to adapt the doctrine of delicacy to all aspects of womanhood, physical, intellectual, and moral. It was his warning that men recoiled from women who evidenced wide learning and indelicate ways. Mrs. Gaskell's aristocratic ladies are more representative of Mrs. Chapone's teachings, for they demonstrate knowledge and refinement.

The education which young women of the middle orders received was modelled on the educational experiences of aristocratic ladies. The six gentlewomen who live with Lady Ludlow are exposed to Mrs. Chapone's Letters and Dr. Gregory's Advice to Young Ladies just as Lady Ludlow was when she was a girl. Lady Ludlow discusses with them what

---

[1]For summary and discussion of these see P.J. Miller, "The Education of an English Lady, 1770-1820," Diss. University of Alberta 1969, p. 260-269.

is and what is not delicate, and she instructs them in their duty as well-reared daughters - to have no will in opposition to their parents'. When the young women marry they will translate Lady Ludlow's dictum so that it applies to wives, that is, they will have no will in opposition to their husbands'. Lady Ludlow's young gentlewomen also learn to sew, cook, and prepare medicines. They cultivate the civilized pastimes of letter writing, arranging flowers, making conversation, reading, and going for walks. Lady Ludlow's company is really a finishing experience for competent housewives and splendid mothers of the respectable middle orders. She teaches them the duties of their station in life, and strives to make them good representatives of their order.

The education of respectable women in the old order was a function of their role in society, and it had two goals. The first goal was social and domestic competence and the second goal was refinement. The respectable women had domestic, social, and political roles to fill, and they filled them with skill and grace. This combination of skill and grace, or competence and refinement, was what Mrs. Gaskell admired in the respectable ladies of the old order.

Obtaining a husband and having "natural duties" was important for a woman of the lower orders for two reasons. It gave her respectability, in that marriage bestowed position and duties upon her, and it removed her from the tempting admiration of men in general. But there was another reason why a husband was so necessary for such a woman,

and that was an economic reason. Working the land and maintaining the livestock were arduous tasks, and a woman alone was not strong enough to prosper at this kind of work. In "Morton Hall", Mrs. Gaskell describes the struggle of two spinster tenant farmers to survive on a farm after their father dies and there is no man to work it. The two sisters live on the verge of starvation.

> ... Ethelinda and I had much ado to make ends meet. If it had not been for my sister's good management we should have been in debt ... but she proposed that we should go without dinner, and only have a breakfast and a tea, to which I agreed, you may be sure.[1]

As in the case of the respectable woman, it was the poor woman's duty to be an obedient, loyal wife. Mrs. Gaskell describes such obedience and loyalty in the opening chapter of "Lizzie Leigh", a story about a poor farming family. Mr. and Mrs. Leigh "had been two and twenty years man and wife ... perfect uprightness on the one side, and the most complete confidence and loving submission on the other ... for he was truly the interpreter who stood between God and her ...."[2] This complete confidence and loving submission testify to Mrs. Leigh's understanding of a wife's first duty. When her husband disowns their wayward daughter, Mrs. Leigh's heart aches with a sense of injustice but she says nothing.

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Morton Hall", Cranford (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 466.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh", Cranford, p. 206.

In the old order the women of the lower orders had much work to do. It was a woman's duty to supply all the provisions for the household. In Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Gaskell gives detailed but somewhat romanticized, descriptions of the farm woman's work. In the mornings Sylvia and Mrs. Robson work in the dairy, milking cows and churning butter. Sylvia helps her mother by "scrubbing the churn and all the wooden implements of butter making,"[1] and once a week she takes fresh butter and eggs to the market to be sold. The afternoons are filled with house cleaning, washing, baking, and curing meats. The prodigious supply of food testifies to Mrs. Robson's energy and skill: "The great rack of clap-bread hung overhead .... Flitches of bacon and "hands" (shoulders of cured pork) ... abounded; and for any visitor who could stay, neither cream nor the finest wheaten flour was wanting ...."[2] In the evenings Sylvia and her mother sit in front of the fire and spin and knit.

In "The Doom of the Griffiths", Mrs. Gaskell once again draws attention to the self-sufficiency of the country farm wife. Nest Pritchard serves a noonday meal to her father and his guest, and the entire meal is comprised of

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 49.

[2]Ibid., p. 38.

farm products which Nest has prepared, "some ewe-milk cheese, very hard and dry, oat-cake, slips of the dried kid's-flesh broiled ... delicious butter and fresh butter-milk, with a liquor ... composed the frugal repast ...."[1]

The women of the poorer orders also did outside work on the farms. In "Cumberland Sheep Shearers," Mrs. Gaskell describes the women's part in the annual sheep shearing: "The women seized the fleece, and, standing by the side of a temporary dresser ... they fold it up. This, again is an art, simple as it may seem; and the farmers' wives and daughters are famous for it ..... Six comely women were thus employed ...."[2] Besides helping with the fleeces, the women are responsible for feeding all the families at the shearing, a total of seventy people. The amount and variety of food which Mrs. Gaskell describes testifies to what she viewed as the high quality of life in the old order: "Rounds of beef, hams, fillets of veal, and legs of mutton bobbed, indiscriminately with plum puddings, up and down in a great boiler ...."[3] These descriptions of the abundance of food combined with the idyllic pictures of farm women at work, as in Sylvia's Lovers, demonstrate the degree to which Mrs. Gaskell viewed the farming poor from a middle-class perspective. The drudgery and primitiveness of rural farm life are politely ignored.

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Doom of the Griffiths", My Lady Ludlow, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 255.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Cumberland Sheep Shearers", Ruth, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 461.

[3]Ibid., p. 465.

The relationships between poor men and women are very much economic ones. They are in fact working relationships. For this reason, an unhealthy woman was viewed by a man as a liability. This is well illustrated in the story, "The Well of Pen Morfa", in which the village beauty, Nest Gwynn, is crippled by a fall at the well. Her intended husband, Edward Williams, breaks off his engagement to Nest by saying to her mother, "I've a deal of cattle, and the farm makes heavy work, as much as an able, healthy woman can do."[1] In other words, one of the criteria for choosing a wife was whether or not she could contribute physical labour, and while Mrs. Gaskell sympathizes with Nest Gwynn when Edward Williams breaks off the engagement, she does not paint him as being an inordinately cruel man but rather as being realistc.

Women of the poor who did not have husbands or fathers to provide for them often hired themselves out as servants. This hiring took place at the annual fairs. In Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Robson becomes very angry because Mr. Robson, after indulging in drink, shows poor taste by letting Sylvia mix with these servant girls. Mrs. Robson says, "I had never no opinion o' th' wenches as 'll set themselves to be hired for servants i' th' fair; they're a bad lot as cannot find places for theirselves - 'bout goin' and stannin' to

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Well of Pen Morfa", Cranford, p. 252.

be stared at by folk .... my Sylvie went and demeaned hersel' ...."[1] In her stories of the poor, this is the only extensive comment that Mrs. Gaskell makes on servant girls who hire themselves out to their own class. But this passage suggests that a woman without the protection of a husband or father was not highly regarded by her own community.

The social and cultural activities of the women of the lower orders were rich and meaningful and centered around work and religion. The feast after the day's work in "Cumberland Sheep-Shearers" is a typical social event. Special foods are prepared and served outdoors in a picnic-like atmosphere. People come "from over mountains, and beyond wild fells .... just as their ancestors did."[2] The annual fair in Sylvia's Lovers is an opportunity to renew old friendships and engage in some gossiping. Weddings, christenings, funerals, and weekly church service were all occasions which brought the country folk together. Socializing on a smaller scale occurred in front of the fire at night when a friend dropped in for a chat.

The education of a woman of the lower orders was essentially a training program in the ways of good domestic management. From her mother a young girl learned how to

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, p. 131.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Cumberland Sheep Shearers", Ruth, p. 464.

cook, sew, spin, knit, wash, and nurse, plus tend the chickens and manage the dairy. In Sylvia's Lovers, there exists a very clear sense of Sylvia acting as an apprentice to her mother. Mrs. Robson appraises all of Sylvia's domestic work. She even keeps certain food supplies and linens locked in a great bureau, and Sylvia has to ask for permission to open it.

In Mrs. Gaskell's stories, only a small number of poor women receive any formal instruction in reading and writing. Mrs. Robson is very determined that Sylvia's cousin, Philip, teach Sylvia to read and write, but this is because Mrs. Robson has a great respect for education not common among women of her class. She says to Sylvia, "Be a good lass. I set a deal o' store by learning and father 'ud never send thee to school, as has struck by me sore."[1] But Sylvia has no interest in learning; she says that she would rather be whipped. She claims that she cannot see the use of it. Sylvia's attitude is not difficult to understand, for of what use indeed would reading and writing be to her?

In My Lady Ludlow and Wives and Daughters, the aristocratic ladies establish charity schools for the daughters of the lower orders. As mentioned earlier, these schools trained the young girls in the skills and knowledge necessary for their station in life. This included skills in sewing,

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, p. 99.

cooking, spinning, and neatness, and knowledge of the proper respect which they were expected to show to their social betters. This was formal education imposed on the poor from above, and it is interesting to note that Mrs. Gaskell writes of such charity school education from the standpoint of the group that provided it, rather than from the standpoint of the group that received it. Mrs. Gaskell describes the charity school education, but she does not imply that it played a significant role in the lives of poor women.

Another aspect of a woman's education, which was conveyed informally among the lower orders, was the development of a womanly sense of propriety. Despite the value placed upon good health and strength, Mrs. Gaskell believed that a robust constitution and ability to work hard were, for the lower orders, not at all inimical to female propriety. As with respectable women, the women of the lower orders had to possess some sense of propriety if they hoped to be treated respectfully by men. Among the country women, propriety found its strongest expression in the concept of modesty.

An example of a girl who is poorly educated in the ways of female propriety is Molly Corney in Sylvia's Lovers. By means of Molly Corney, Mrs. Gaskell demonstrates that aberrations of maidenly modesty did exist in the old order, but they were censored by the community in general. Molly lacks all knowledge of how a young maiden should conduct

herself. When she becomes engaged, she boasts of it in a "loud, laughing, and boistrous"[1] manner. Mrs. Robson says of Molly, "She is not pretty behaved, making such an ado about men-kind, as if they were two-headed calves to be run after."[2] Mrs. Robson also observes that Molly's behavior is not "maidenly."[3] In Mrs. Robson's opinion, a well-brought-up girl does not make herself an object of curiosity and gossip. She thought that

> ... it was creditable to a woman to go through life in the shadow of obscurity-never named except in connection with good housewifery, husband, or children. Too much talking about a girl, even in the way of praise, disturbed Mrs. Robson's opinion of her ...[4]

Nest Pritchard in "The Doom of the Griffiths" is another of Mrs. Gaskell's characters who lacks a sense of maidenly propriety. Her behavior is infested with "worldliness"[5] for she "coquetted, and flirted, and went to the extreme lengths of Welsh courtship, till the seniors of the village shook their heads ...."[6] A neighbour woman of the Pritchards' quotes an old country saying which explains how girls like Nest were regarded by the community: "Three things

---

[1] Ibid., p. 123.

[2] Ibid., p. 123.

[3] Ibid., p. 124.

[4] Ibid., p. 129.

[5] Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Doom of the Griffiths", My Lady Ludlow, p. 253.

[6] Ibid., p. 253.

are alike: a fine barn without corn, a fine cup without drink, a fine woman without her reputation."[1]

Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" is representative of a well-educated girl of the poor. It is her maidenly deportment and quiet, graceful ways which capture Will Leigh's heart: "She never spoke much; she was generally diligently at work; but when she moved it was so noiselessly, and when she did speak, it was in (a) low and soft ... voice ..."[2] In "Cumberland Sheep-Shearers", Mrs. Gaskell describes the courting procedure between a good country girl and her lover. Each time that her lover looks her way, the country girl blushes "deeper and even deeper."[3] This female modesty was a quality of the poor women which Mrs. Gaskell admired very much.

As in the case of a respectable woman, a woman of the lower orders was educated to show deference to the man of the house. This was done informally, primarily by the power of example. The mother's attitudes and ways were the example on which the daughter modelled her behavior. The woman's husband, like Lady Ludlow's husband, may not have been particularly admirable, but it was a wife's duty to be

---

[1] Ibid., p. 253.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh", Cranford, p. 217.

[3] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Cumberland Sheep Shearers", Ruth, p. 463.

submissive and to love him.

In Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Gaskell makes it very clear that it is Mrs. Robson who is the strength of the Robson family. Mr. Robson, a harpooner on a whaling vessel turned farmer, is a great dreamer and talker. As Sylvia says, "Ay! but mother's words are scarce, and weigh heavy. Feyther's liker me, and we talk a deal o' rubble; but mother's words are liker to hewn stone."[1] Mr. Robson also indulges in drink, and because his self-control is not highly developed, Mrs. Robson has to lock the liquor in a cabinet and dispense it in small quantities. Mrs. Robson recognizes her husband's weaknesses, and even though she is a stronger more highly-principled person, she never questions his authority. When he is sickly and confined to the house, she tolerates his advice on how she should do her housework. This piques her very much, but she submits graciously and even reprimands Sylvia for her satirical objections.

> ... Daniel Robson sat for four live-long days, advising and directing his wife in all such minor matters as the boiling of potatoes, the making of porridge, all the work on which she expecially piqued herself, and on which she would have taken advice - no! not from the most skilled housewife in all the three Ridings. But somehow she managed to keep her tongue quiet from

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, p. 13.

> telling him ... to mind his own business .... She even checked Sylvia when the latter proposed ... that his ignorant directions should be followed ....[1]

Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" is another example of a woman's respect for male authority. Susan's father is given to drunkenness, and although this upsets Susan very much, she does not rebuke him. She waits for him to return from "getting tipsey at some public-house"[2], and when he finally arrives home she quietly helps him to bed.

In summary, the education of women of the lower orders consisted primarily of training in domestic duties and in the ways of feminine propriety. This education was a reflection of the woman's role in society and, Mrs. Gaskell believed, it prepared her to fulfill her role with competence, modesty, and virtue.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that the role and education of women in the old order made possible the co-existence of two very important qualities - competence and refinement, as in the case of respectable women, or competence and domestic virtue, as in the case of the women of the lower orders. In the old order, competence was not possible without refinement or virtue and refinement and virtue were not possible without competence. The qualities were directly related.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 48.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh", Cranford, p. 230.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that a woman displayed the virtue of competence when she successfully fulfilled the duties inherent in her role. These included domestic duties, social duties, and, in the case of the aristocratic woman, political duties. This does not mean that Mrs. Gaskell believed these were the only duties that a woman could successfully handle. Miss Galindo in My Lady Ludlow demonstrates that a woman can do a man's work when she acts as Mr. Horner's clerk, as does Miss Phillis in "Morton Hall" when she supervises the farm labourers. But Mrs. Gaskell's observation in both these cases is that although women can do men's work, it does not follow that they should. In My Lady Ludlow, Miss Galindo's appointment as Mr. Horner's clerk makes Mrs. Gaskell's view very clear. Lady Ludlow, who is against women usurping men's work, wishes to foil Mr. Horner's plan of having as his clerk a young farm boy whom he has taught to read. Therefore, she appoints Miss Galindo to the position to teach Mr. Horner a lesson. Women can do men's work just as farm boys can be taught to read and to assume duties above their station, but what is the point of either action? If farmer's sons become clerks, who will farm? Each of the orders in the old society and each sex had its own distinctive role, and therefore its own distinctive opportunity for displaying competence. Mrs. Gaskell admired the old society for this reason: women

could experience the dignity which accompanied the virtue of competence.

The qualities of refinement and virtue enabled a woman to fulfill her role effectively, because they made her aware of her own strengths and weaknesses. Mrs. Gaskell believed that a woman's primary weakness was a physical one. She believed that this physical disadvantage had to be recognized and compensated for in some manner. In her opinion, the code of refinement and modesty of the women of the old society was a woman's best aid in helping her to fulfill her role. This code made a virtue of women's dependence on male generosity and gentleness. It taught a woman not to proclaim her rights, but to appeal to a man's sense of duty and generosity. Mrs. Gaskell did not believe that this basic difference between the sexes could be nullified by legislation. When she was asked to sign the married woman's property bill in 1856, she did so with great reluctance. "A husband can coax, wheedle, beat or tyrannize his wife out of something and no law whatever will help this that I can see ... though I don't see the definite end proposed by these petitions I'll sign."[1] The old society made possible the virtue of refinement because it was a society that stressed duties, not rights. Mrs. Gaskell believed that refinement in a woman was a useful as well as a highly admirable quality.

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 379.

In summary, Mrs. Gaskell admired the old society because she believed that it made possible the existence of the virtuous woman, that is, the woman who was competent as well as refined or modest. However, this admiration for the old order did not blind her to its limitations. In Cranford, she conveys the sense of tragedy and incompleteness in the lives of the women who were educated for "natural duties", but who never had any. In Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Gaskell gives a vivid depiction of the lot of farm servant girls who had to hire themselves out to do drudge labour in order to support themselves. In "Morton Hall", she presents the agony of Miss Phillis as she struggles to maintain her respectability in the face of poverty and starvation. Mrs. Gaskell realized that all these experiences were also part of the old order, but she still looked back fondly to what she believed was a more gracious past and a more human way of life.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN IN THE NEW ORDER

After her marriage to William Gaskell in 1832, Elizabeth Gaskell moved from Knutsford to Manchester where she lived until her death in 1865. Manchester was the prototype of cities in the new industrialized society and its blemishes, which have been duly recorded by social historians, were easily perceived. It was a great sprawling city of brick and iron with soot-laden air and hordes of transient workers. In today's parlance it was what we would call a 'boom town', and it had all the social problems which that term calls to mind. There were great fluctuations in the economy, high prices, over-crowded living conditions, health and sanitation problems, a high crime rate, and much poverty. Considering her early life in Knutsford, a more radical change in environment could not have been possible for Elizabeth Gaskell.

As the wife of a Unitarian minister, Mrs. Gaskell was involved in much community work, and being a lady, she addressed herself almost exclusively to matters pertaining to her own sex and to children. Her correspondence strongly

reflects this tendency to focus on the traditionally feminine concerns of family life, domestic management, dress, and social events. It is therefore not surprising that when she wrote about the effects of industrialization on life in the new order, one of her prime concerns was its effect on the lives of women. Mrs. Gaskell's thirty-three years in Manchester, combined with her many social acquaintances and her extensive philanthropic work, rendered her well qualified to comment on the lives of women of both the working and middle classes who were experiencing the effects of the emerging industrial society.

In Manchester, Mrs. Gaskell had considerable contact with the lives of poor women. She taught Sunday school classes which contained primarily factory girls, and during times of great unemployment in Manchester she organized sewing schools for poor women who were capable of working and nursed those who were too sick to work.[1] Mrs. Gaskell was involved in the reclaiming of prostitutes, in finding homes for orphan children, in sewing clothing for poor women, and in securing passages to the New World for young women who wished to make a fresh start in life.[2] This work acquainted Mrs. Gaskell with many of the complex problems of poor women. These problems she documented in her first novel,

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 105.

[2] Ibid., p. 105.

Mary Barton (1848), and later in North and South (1855), with an exactness and vividness that made her one of the foremost industrial novelists of her time.

Mrs. Gaskell's comments on the lives of respectable women in the new order also drew heavily on personal experience and observation. Of no small importance was the fact that she raised her four daughters in the new urban society. In her letters she frequently puzzled over her daughters' education, work, and prospects for the future. She worried about her daughters living in the rough city of Manchester, and once considered moving to Coniston, in the country, where she knew they would be treated with the respect due to ladies. She wrote to her friend, Charles Bosanquet, in 1859, expressing this thought:

> ... once upon a time we thought of buying land and building a house there as a future home for our girls, because there is a kind of old-fashioned chivalrous respect paid to women in all that country, which we thought would be a pleasant surrounding for brotherless women....[1]

Mrs. Gaskell's rich social life gave her ample opportunity to observe and interact with the respectable women of her day. William Gaskell's family was quite large and Mrs. Gaskell maintained close contact with these relatives all her life. Her letters are full of references to visits by

---

[1]J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 571.

relatives or to friends dropping in for tea. When Mrs. Gaskell wrote about respectable women in the new order, it was on these middle class women and middle class situations that she primarily drew.

Although Mrs. Gaskell lived in Manchester for thirty-three years, the grimy city never endeared itself to her. She went on many trips to the country and to the continent to escape from Manchester. She always insisted that life in that industrial city was injurious to her health. This distaste for life in the huge manufacturing centers of the new order was shared by other writers of her day. Her views on life in the new order, which she first expresses in Mary Barton (1848), opened the channels of friendship and communication with some of the most distinguished of her contemporaries, Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Carlyle to name a few. While Mrs. Gaskell shared with them the view that the social effects of the new order were primarily negative, her special contribution to an analysis of the social conditions of her day was her genuine, nonmanipulative interest in humanity. It is this non-partisan quality of Mrs. Gaskell's work which renders her portrayal of the new industrialized society especially valuable.

Mrs. Gaskell perceived the new order as embracing the dissolution of the old social roles and the confusion of the search for new ones. Whereas the old order stressed stability and duties, the new order stressed change and rights. This change in values and the breakdown of old rules

had a significant effect on the role of women in society. It was Mrs. Gaskell's opinion that the values of the new order were inimical to the existence of the virtuous woman. She believed that the qualities which made a woman virtuous in the old order - competence and refinement, or competence and domestic virtue - were no longer complementary in the new order. Indeed, they became mutually exclusive characteristics and this, Mrs. Gaskell believed, was one of the great social costs of the new order.

As in the old order, the primary function of the respectable woman in the new order was to be a wife and mother. Mrs. Gaskell believed that the women of the new order, however, did not engage in their role with the same high sense of duty that the women of the old order once did. The topics of love and marriage, for example, no longer called forth deep blushes and lowered eyes, but were the subjects of frivolous conversation. In Wives and Daughters, the ageing Lady Cumnor has to reprimand her youngest, unmarried daughter for her flippant remarks about love. Lady Harriet declares that she is "well versed in the tender passion, thanks to novels,"[1] and that she has "talked all the freshness off love"[2] and for that reason is "tired of the subject."[3] To these remarks of Lady Harriet, Lady Cumnor

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 104.

[2]Ibid., p. 104. [3]Ibid., p. 104.

makes a response which is representative of the attitude held by the older generation of ladies. She says, "My dear Harriet, don't let me hear you talking of love in that way; it is not pretty. Love is a serious thing."[1] Cynthia Gibson, in Wives and Daughters, has such limited understanding of the seriousness of love and marriage that she pledges herself to two gentlemen at the same time. Even when a woman did take marriage seriously, and was therefore sympathetic to a proposal, Mrs. Gaskell believed that the motivation was not always admirable. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gibson represents those women who married for economic reasons, but feigned reasons of the heart. After Mr. Gibson proposes, the future Mrs. Gibson thinks of "... how pleasant it will be to have a husband once more - some one who will work, while she sits at her elegant ease in a prettily-furnished drawing-room .... it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood.[2]

Mrs. Gibson's vision of "elegant ease" was what many respectable women expected from marriage in the new order. Whereas duties and responsibilities testified to a woman's influence and status in the old order, in the new order the premium was on idleness. An idle wife affirmed her husband's wealth. Her idleness indicated that he had sufficient wealth to employ servants to tend to all the household tasks, and

---

[1] Ibid., p. 104.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

in the new order this wealth became the measure of middle class respectability. Mrs. Bradshaw, in the novel Ruth, is never engaged in any kind of work, for she has servants to run the household and a governess to look after the children. She spends her afternoons visiting or "asleep in her easy-chair."[1] In North and South, Margaret Hale describes the frivolous activities which fill the day in her Aunt Shaw's household.

> ... all the decisions she needed to make were what dress she would wear for dinner, and to help Edith to draw out the lists of who should take down whom in the dinner parties at home .... Once a year, there was a long discussion between her aunt and Edith as to whether they should go to the Isle of Wight, abroad, or to Scotland ....[2]

Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters spends her day ringing for her servants. By the day's end they are exhausted from running upstairs and downstairs to tend to Mrs. Gibson's whims.

Because the respectable women in the new order were no longer held responsible for many of the duties which had accompanied the role of wife and mother in the old order, they lost the respect and authority which had accompanied those duties. In Ruth, Mrs. Bradshaw is described as "sweet-

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, p. 229.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 56.

looking, but as if she was thoroughly broken into submission."[1] Her husband bullies her at tea parties, gives little talks on her failings, and "did not dislike confessing his wife's errors."[2] Another example of the husband's loss of respect for the wife, and therefore an erosion of the wife's authority, is found in Wives and Daughters. Mr. Gibson does not abuse his wife as Mr. Bradshaw does; he simply withdraws from her company.

> On the whole, it was well that Mr. Gibson spent so much of his time from home. He sometimes thought so himself, when he heard his wife's plaintive fret or pretty babble over totally indifferent things, and perceived how flimsy a nature were all her fine sentiments ... he willfully shut his eyes and waxed up his ears ....[3]

Mrs. Gaskell observed that the respectable women in the new order frequently did not command the respect of their children, and therefore they had very little authority over them. The Bradshaws' daughter, Jemima, in the novel Ruth, is a willful, sullen girl. Her mother has no influence over her and Jemima does practically whatever she pleases. Mr. Bradshaw, although he is partially to blame for Jemima's

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, p. 152.

[2]Ibid., p. 209.

[3]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 372.

behavior, despairs at her obstinate ways and ultimately attributes them to Mrs. Bradshaw's failure to exercise discipline with the children. "Mrs. Bradshaw, was, he confessed, rather less firm that he should have liked with the girls."[1] In The Moorland Cottage, Mrs. Browne is also unable to command respect and obedience from her child. Her son, Edward, is indulged as a child and when he reaches adulthood he indulges himself. He acquires large debts which absorb all his mother's savings, and eventually he turns to forgery. In Wives and Daughters, Cynthia Gibson admits that she has little respect or love for her mother, as she explains to her stepsister, Molly, "It's very shocking, I daresay; but it is so. Now don't go and condemn me. I don't think love for one's mother quite comes by nature...."[2] Mrs. Gaskell quite agreed with Cynthia's statement. Love for one's mother did not come by nature, but was something which the successful mother earned by fulfilling her duty as a mother. Jemima Bradshaw and Cynthia Gibson were educated by governesses and boarding schools, while their mothers slept in easy chairs, ran schools for other people's children, or socialized. Edward Browne was the idol of his mother. In the process of indulging him, she failed to guide him and form his character. Mrs. Gaskell saw these impoverished

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, p. 209.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 252.

mother-child relationships as one more result of the disintegration of the traditional role of women in the new order.

The disintegration of the traditional role of women in the new industrialized society resulted primarily from the desire of the middle class to give conspicuous proof of its wealth, and one way of doing this was to imitate the aristocracy and relegate to servants and governesses many of those functions which had formerly been the responsibilities of the lady of the house. This meant that women no longer had sufficient number of opportunities to demonstrate competence. Mrs. Gaskell believed that this decline in competence was accompanied by the rise of what might be termed false refinement. As the one quality atrophied, the other flourished.

Mrs. Gaskell perceived the refinement of the respectable women of the new order as being false, primarily because it was pretentious and unrelated to competence. Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters, typifies the woman of the new order who was afflicted with the odium of false refinement. She does no real work but spends her time imitating the manners and ways of her social betters. She exploits the concept of refinement in that she does not practise it to dignify her station in life, but to rise above it. When Mr. Gibson brings the new Mrs. Gibson home after the honeymoon, Mrs. Gibson sets about eradicating all the old familiar ways in the Gibson

household and replacing them with the customs she has observed in Lady Cumnor's household, customs totally unsuited to a country doctor's establishment. One of Mrs. Gibson's 'improvements' is to serve dessert with every meal.

> ... neither Mrs. Gibson nor Molly touched dessert, it was set on the table with as much form as if Cynthia had been at home ... Mr. Gibson ... protested against 'persons in their station in life having a formal dessert before them everyday.'
>
> And Mrs. Gibson herself apologised, as it were, to Molly today, in the same words she had often used to Mr. Gibson, 'It's no extravagance, for we need not eat it - I never do. But it looks well ....[1]

This is just one of Mrs. Gibson's many attempts to "train her appetite to gentility."[2] She also forbids Mr. Gibson to eat cheese, as it is a food which she feels is very vulgar, and she proclaims that only cold luncheons should be prepared each day because cooking leaves odours in the house which "noses of aristocratic refinement"[3] find offensive.

Another character afflicted with false refinement is Fanny Thornton in North and South. Fanny has grown up in the manufacturing town of Milton and is a product of its direct, forceful ways; yet she pretends to a kind of refinement which is totally unrelated to her experience and the kind of world

---

[1] Ibid., p. 579.

[2] Ibid., p. 377.

[3] Ibfd., p. 203.

in which she lives. She never does any work but is always too tired to venture anywhere on foot. Whether she goes to her drawing master or her music teacher, Fanny insists that the horses and carriage be made ready. When Mrs. Thornton inquires why she is tired, Fanny replies, "I don't know - the weather I think."[1] Fanny's exotic sense of refinement also makes her declare that a piano is "a necessary of life"[2], and that public concerts are a strain because "the directors admitted so indiscriminately."[3] Even though she has never been away from Milton, she dismisses it as a "dirty, smoky place"[4], and at the same time raves about how she longs to see London.

In the old order refined ladies did not make a display of delicate health, although it was gently implied. In the new order the respectable women make a grand spectacle not only of their delicate health but of their numerous ailments and complaints. Mrs. Gaskell is satirical in her depictions of such excessive frail health among the respectable women of the new order. In North and South, Mrs. Thornton remarks of Fanny that she is "seldom without an ailment."[5] When the workers in Mr. Thornton's mill go on strike and march to the Thornton home, Fanny faints in terror and is

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, p. 110.

[2]Ibid., p. 112.

[3]Ibid., p. 112.

[4]Ibid., p. 113.

[5]Ibid., p. 110.

weak for several days afterwards. In The Moorland Cottage, Mrs. Buxton passes her days laying on her sofa, "fair, white and colourless ...."[1] Caroline Tomkinson, in "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", is also continually on her sick bed. The young doctor describes her as "very delicate and die-away"[2], but he is never able to determine exactly what is wrong with her. But Miss Caroline's health is so delicate that it is a strain for her to take a cart-ride for a picnic. "Miss Caroline Tomkinson once or twice was rather faint with the motion of the cart, and asked me for my smelling bottle, as she had forgotten hers."[3]

Pretentiousness and exaggerated delicate health were two characteristics of the false refinement of the respectable women of the new order. A third characteristic was uncontrolled sensibility. Whereas the ladies of the old order evidenced a control which rendered them highly dignified in painful situations, the women of the new order make a grand display of their feelings whenever the occasion allows. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gibson weeps copious tears when Mr. Gibson proposes to her. "Oh! Mr. Gibson,' she said; and then, a little to his surprise, and a great deal to her own, she burst into hysterical tears ....[4]

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage", Cranford, p. 284.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskel, "Mr. Harrison's Confessions", My Lady Ludlow, p. 415.

[3]Ibid., p. 427.

[4]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 120.

Mrs. Gibson also weeps when her daughter, Cynthia, breaks off her engagement to Mr. Preston. In North and South, a few curt words between Margaret Hale and her cousin, Edith Shaw, cause Edith to "sob bitterly"[1] and lay on the sofa for the rest of the day, a victim of wounded feelings.

A fourth characteristic of the false refinement of the new order was garishness. Mrs. Gaskell recoiled from the loud, noisy taste of the nouveau riche. In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell spares no detail in describing the undiscriminating taste which was so prevalent in the new order. In the Thornton home, "every corner seemed filled up with ornament until it became a weariness to the eye"[2], and at their dinner parties, Margaret Hale feels "the number of delicacies to be oppressive."[3] Fanny Thornton, who prides herself on discriminating taste, chooses the glossiest material available for her wedding gown.

Mrs. Gaskell provides many other examples of the garish taste of the women of the new order. In My Lady Ludlow, the affluent baker's wife goes to tea in a flashy silk gown, and for a napkin she pulls out a "pocket-handkerchief, all red and yellow silk ...."[4] The Bradshaws' tea service, in Ruth, is described as being "as handsome

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, p. 489.

[2]Ibid., p. 189. [3]Ibid., p. 189.

[4]Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p. 215.

and as ugly as money could purchase."[1] In Mrs. Gaskell's opinion, all these attempts at refinement are the acme of vulgarity and highly offensive to anyone of good breeding.

The preceding discussion on respectable women in the new order focused on the new middle class women who had no social function and therefore only false refinement. Their refinement was false because it was ostentatious and affected. It served no purpose other than affirming the wealth and social ambitions of the new middle class. Mrs. Gaskell observed, however, that there existed in the new order another distinct group of women consisting of those women who had been born and educated in the old order, but whose lives extended into the modern, industrialized world.

This group is best represented by the ladies in Cranford. They have true refinement, but in the latter part of their lives no genuine, meaningful social function. The fine distinctions of rank, which they had been taught to respect and preserve, mean very little in the new order. Thus the ladies of Cranford are shocked and incredulous when Lady Glenmire stoops to marry the village surgeon. Another example of the erosion of the finer distinctions of rank and manners is the declining prestige of the old assembly hall - once a place where the county families met for balls and receptions, now a place of magic shows, attended by all and sundry. The old assembly hall, which the

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, p. 187.

ladies of Cranford had once attended in order to do honour to the county families, is now in a process of decay, as is the social function of the ladies themselves.

> ... the old room was dingy; salmoned-coloured paint had faded into drab; great pieces of plaster had chipped off from the white wreaths and festoons on its walls; but still a mouldy odour of aristocracy lingered about the place, and a dusty recollection of the days that were gone made Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester bridle up as they entered ....[1]

The old way of life, which the ladies of Cranford are trying to preserve, receives a devastating jolt when Miss Matty's investments fail. By means of this incident, Mrs. Gaskell emphasizes the precarious position of the women of refinement who found themselves without money, for in the new order money was the only assurance of respect and security. The question which Mrs. Gaskell is posing here is a tragic one. How can a lady who cherishes the old values survive in the new order? All the skills and qualities which Miss Matty possesses are no longer thought worth acquiring, and her refinement and honesty are such that she is sure to do poorly in the world of trade where ruthlessness is the key to success.

> I thought of all the things by which a woman, past middle age, and with the education common to ladies fifty years ago, could

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford, p. 103.

> earn or add to a living without materially losing caste; but at length I put even this last clause on one side, and wondered what in the world Miss Matty could do.[1]
>
> .....
>
> No! there was nothing she could teach to the rising generation of Cranford, unless they had been quick learners and ready imitators of her patience, her humility, her sweetness, her quiet contentment with all that she could not do.[2]

In summary, Mrs. Gaskell perceived that in the new order the traditional role of respectable women had undergone a process of disintegration. The new middle class women had lost their social function and thus possessed only false refinement. The older ladies, who were products of the old order, possessed true refinement but no social function. Mrs. Gaskell believed that these were two types of respectable women in the new order. The first type was a comic figure; the second type was tragic.

The disintegration of traditional roles in the new order and the search for new ones are reflected in the kind of education which Mrs. Gaskell's respectable female characters receive.

In "Morton Hall", the three Morton sisters, who are

---

[1] Ibid., p. 156.

[2] Ibid., p. 158.

the last inhabitants of the hall, cannot agree on how to educate their niece, Miss Cordelia. By associating each of the three sisters with a different philosophy of education, Mrs. Gaskell emphasizes the confusion surrounding the question of education in the new order. The eldest sister, Miss Sophronia Morton, educates Miss Cordelia in the eighteenth-century "blue-stocking" tradition of Mrs. Chapone. In fact, Miss Sophronia is writing a book which she calls 'The Female Chesterfield', or 'Letters from a Lady of Quality to Her Niece'. She reads to Miss Cordelia from this book while "the little niece sat there in a high chair, with a flat board tied to her back ...."[1] Besides these lessons on manners and deportment, Miss Cordelia receives lessons in geography. It is Miss Sophronia's belief that "good little girls can learn anything they choose, even French verbs."[2]

The second sister, Miss Annabella Morton, believes that education, rather than developing the intellect, should develop the sensibilities and cultivate the tastes.

> Her voice [Mrs. Gaskell recalled] was very sweet and plaintive, and suited well with the kind of things she said: all about charms of nature, and tears and grief, and such sort of talk, which reminded me rather of poetry-very pretty to listen to, though I never could understand it ....[3]

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Morton Hall", Cranford, p. 476.

[2] Ibid., p. 477.

[3] Ibid., p. 478.

While with Miss Annabella, Miss Cordelia "read works of imagination"[1] and "played on the spinnet."[2]

The youngest Morton sister is Miss Dorothy. Her educational beliefs are extremely scanty and possess no philosophical basis. In outlining Miss Dorothy's system, Mrs. Gaskell makes a hyperbolic comment on education in order to convey the confusion and disorientation which surrounded the role of women in the new order. From a perusal of Miss Dorothy's educational practice, one cannot determine exactly for what purpose women are being educated: "The rules that were made for Miss Cordelia! She was to eat her meals standing, that was one thing! Another was, that she was to drink two cups of cold water before she had any pudding .... Then there were ever so many words she might not use ...."[3] Mrs. Gaskell's humourous treatment of the three Morton sisters and their strict views on education demonstrates her aversion to educational systems which were based on abstract theory rather than common sense.

In Wives and Daughters, Mr. Gibson, a product of the old order, sums up his instructions regarding his daughter Molly's education by saying to Miss Eyre, the governess,

> 'Don't teach Molly too much: she must sew, and read, and write,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 478. [2] Ibid., p. 478

[3] Ibid., p. 483.

> and do her sums .... After all, I'm not sure that reading or writing is necessary. Many a good woman gets married with only a cross instead of her name; it's rather diluting to motherwit, to my fancy; but, however, we must yield to the prejudices of society, Miss Eyre, and so you may teach the child to read.[1]

This is fundamentally the philosophy of the old order regarding women's education, and it is only after much pleading that Molly secures her father's approval for French and drawing lessons, the 'accomplishments' which are the hallmark of an educated woman in the new order.

Cynthia Gibson, Mr. Gibson's step-daughter by his second marriage, is a girl who received a truly 'modern' education. She is educated in France where she picks up many "airs and graces"[2], but not a great deal of learning. Cynthia confesses that after her schooling in France she still does not know "even the A B C of science."[3] She also admits "... I don't know longitude from latitude now; and I'm always puzzled as to which is perpendicular and which is horizontal."[4] Mrs. Gibson thinks it quite acceptable for a young girl to plead ignorance of these "severer studies."[5] However, when Cynthia denies Mrs. Gibson's

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 35.

[2] Ibid., p. 138.

[3] Ibid., p. 308.

[4] Ibid., p. 308.

[5] Ibid., p. 308.

claim that her daughter has a prodigious memory for poetry, she has a great deal to say.

> 'How could you talk such nonsense, Cynthia!' said Mrs. Gibson, as the girls followed her upstairs. 'You know you are not a dunce. It is all very well not to be a blue-stocking, because gentle-people don't like that kind of woman; but running yourself down, and contradicting all I said about your liking Byron, and poets and poetry - to Osborne Hamley of all men too!'[1]

The one things that Cynthia does learn at school in France is to play the piano and sing. The education which Cynthia receives is essentially a decorative education. She acquires pleasing ways, pretty airs and graces, and the ability to sing and play the piano. These 'accomplishments' are thought to constitute a sufficient education for a respectable middle-class girl, for Cynthia has no other skills but these and at one point she considers going out as a governess to teach other young girls.

In North and South and The Moorland Cottage, the young girls receive educations which are similar to Cynthia Gibson's. Fanny Thornton in North and South goes to a drawing master and a piano teacher. Mrs. Browne in The Moorland Cottage reluctantly teaches her daughter, Maggie, to read, write, and do arithmetic, but she lays the greatest stress on learning to play the piano which she considers to

---

[1] Ibid., p. 309.

be "the front of a genteel education."[1] Erminia Buxton, in The Moorland Cottage, is sent to school in France "to receive more regular instruction"[2], but this again is instruction in 'accomplishments'. Mrs. Gaskell observes that "... she came home once a year, more lovely and elegant and dainty than ever ...."[3] "Erminia went to the piano, and sang her newest and choicest French airs."[4]

Mrs. Gaskell believed that in the new order, the subject of the respectable woman's education elicited much controversy. There were people like Miss Sophronia who still championed Mrs. Chapone's philosophy. Other people subscribed to Miss Annabella's position that the purpose of education was to develop the sensibilities and cultivate the tastes. The traditional education in domestic skills, which Mr. Gibson chooses for Molly, also still had adherents in the new order. But Mrs. Gaskell believed that the most prevalent mode of education in the new order was the decorative education, or the education of 'accomplishments'.

The decorative education prepared the respectable middle-class girl to compete on the marriage market. It gave her obvious marks of gentility which could be displayed the family drawing room. After the husband was secured,

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage", Cranford, p. 296.

[2]Ibid., p. 299.

[3]Ibid., p. 299.

[4]Ibid., p. 309.

the young wife settled into a life of what Mrs. Gibson described as "elegant ease", a life centered around purely domestic themes. The young wife, who rarely ventured beyond her own drawing room utilized what education she had in reading sentimental novels. Mrs. Gaskell's perception of this consequence of the decorative education is part of the period's criticism of the middle-class novel.

The education of the respectable women in the new order reflected the changing role of women. Women were no longer expected to be competent mothers and skillful domestic managers, for governesses, boarding schools, and servants had assumed all those duties. A respectable woman was expected to be refined and this was what her education attempted to accomplish. But Mrs. Gaskell believed that competence and refinement should be interdependent, and when the woman in the new order lost the opportunities to demonstrate competence, she also lost the basis for true refinement. It was Mrs. Gaskell's belief that refinement which was not tied to domestic and social competence was false refinement. It was refinement that had no relation to function; it was purely for purposes of display. This refinement which was unrelated to function was like Mrs. Gibson's dessert which was not intended for eating: "It looks well ...."[1]

It was the poor women whose lives were most drastically altered in the new order. Whereas the economic

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p. 579.

contribution which they had made to marriage in the old order was tightly integrated into their role of wife and mother, in the new order there occurred a severe fragmentation of this role. Women were still expected to be wives and mothers, as well as to contribute economically to marriage by taking paying jobs outside the home. The poor woman therefore assumed a dual set of responsibilities, those pertaining to being a wife and mother and those pertaining to her outside employment for which she was being paid. Mrs. Gaskell believed that this radical change in the traditional role of poor women was a great tragedy. She believed that life in the new order eradicated all those conditions which, in the old order, had made possible the existence of the virtuous woman. For poor women, life in the new order was inimical to the cultivation of competence and domestic virtue.

As with respectable women, some of the poor women in the new order, particularly in the large towns, developed a flippant attitude towards marriage. It was no longer seen as a serious matter involving many responsibilities and duties, but as something quite trivial in nature. In "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", Anne Dixon boasts of her vulgar understanding of what marriage means: "After all, what is marrying? Just a spree ...."[1] She makes no mention of the ceremony or

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", Mary Barton, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 483.

the church, but speaks only of "eatables"[1] and seeking "refreshments at any public-house we like."[2] This attitude towards marriage is not common among Mrs. Gaskell's poor female characters, but, through Anne Dixon, she demonstrates that it did exist.

Among poor women in the new order, Mrs. Gaskell perceived another abberant attitude towards marriage, one which resembled the respectable woman's vision of marriage as "elegant ease." Among the poor girls, marriage was often conceived of as an escape from the terrible conditions at home, or as a vehicle for social mobility. While the idea of marriage as a vehicle for social mobility was operative long before the nineteenth century, Mrs. Gaskell observed that during her lifetime it received a new intensity and frequency of expression. It was during the nineteenth century that the 'rags to riches' myth really captured people's imaginations, and in Mary Barton, Mary's fantasy about making a fantastic marriage is an example of this view of marriage. In either case, marriage took on the qualities of a fairy tale and was not grounded in the realities of work and responsibilities. Thus in Mary Barton, Mary fantasizes that she is engaged to the factory owner's son.

> So she turned on her pillow, and fell asleep, and dreamt of what was often in her waking thoughts; of the day when she should ride from church in her carriage, with wedding bells

---

[1] Ibid., p. 483.

[2] Ibid., p. 483.

> ringing ... and drive away from the old dim work-a-day court for ever, to live in a grand house ....[1]

Fantasies may well have been necessary for the realities of married life were very painful to poor women in the new order. In the new towns the social problems of over-crowding, poverty, and poor sanitation made it almost impossible for women to be competent housewives. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell describes a typical street in Manchester.

> It was unpaved; and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. Never was the Old Edinburgh cry of 'Gardez l'eau,' more necessary than in this street.... women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot.[2]

The severity of the social conditions made difficult any attempts at good mothering. A woman could not fulfill her role as a mother if she did not have food to feed her children, or if she could not protect them from the diseases

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 121.

[2]Ibid., p. 98.

which infected the slum houses. Mrs. Davenport for example, in Mary Barton, attempts to suckle her two-year old child "from her dry withered breast"[1] as she sits suffering from typhoid and starvation. Mrs. Gaskell gives numerous other examples of such appalling conditions. In North and South the working class neighbourhoods are described as being squalid and oppressive. The severe living conditions of the Davenport family in Mary Barton represent the experiences of many working class people in the huge manufacturing centers:

> You went down one step ... into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at mid-day. After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar ... the smell was so foetid as almost to knock down two men ... three or four little children rolled on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fireplace was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's chair, and cried in the dank loneliness.[2]

By describing such terrible conditions, Mrs. Gaskell demonstrated that the social conditions among the poor in the new order rendered the concept of the virtuous wife and mother meaningless.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 102.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

Another factor which weakened traditional female virtue was the necessity of poor women in the new order to seek work outside the home in order to augment the family income. In the old order, a poor woman often had duties outside the home, as illustrated by the story, "Cumberland Sheep Shearers". But these duties were a function of her total domestic role. In the new order, the job which a woman hired herself out to do was totally unrelated to the fulfillment of the role of wife and mother. Often the job was a duplication of one of her domestic tasks. For example, Alice Wilson, in Mary Barton, and Margaret Hall, in "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", work as washerwomen in the houses of affluent tradesmen. After washing clothes at their employers' homes all day, Alice and Margaret must go home and do their own washing. Mrs. Wilson, in Mary Barton, works as a charwoman. After cleaning someone else's house all day, she must go home and clean her own. It does not require much imagination to envision the effect of this kind of outside employment on the women's enthusiasm for their home duties.

Forms of employment such as charwoman, washerwoman, or domestic servant were usually chosen by older women who had been born in the traditional, rural society, and who migrated to the urban centers to find work. The young girls in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction generally scorn such work as being poorly paid and a species of slavery. When Mary Barton is

sixteen years old and contemplating what work she will do, 'going out to service' is mentioned as one of the alternatives. But against this "Mary set herself with all the force of her strong will."[1]

The other alternative for Mary Barton, and the one which she chooses, is to go as an apprentice to a dressmaker. This is also the work of the eponymous heroine in Ruth. Dressmaking was also poorly paid but was regarded as a respectable line of work for girls of the poorer classes. For example, at Miss Simmonds' shop, Mary is called a 'young lady'. There are other pretensions to gentility which are duly cultivated, their purpose being to compensate for the poor remuneration and the gruelling hard work.

> ... Mary was to work for two years without any remuneration, on consideration of being taught the business: and where afterwards she was to dine and have tea, with a small quarterly salary (paid quarterly because so much more genteel than by the week), a very small one, divisible into a minute weekly pittance.[2]

Ruth Hilton, in the novel Ruth, is also called a 'young lady' while being worked to death at the same time. She and a dozen other girls stitch away in Mrs. Mason's shop until two o'clock in the morning, at which time bread, cheese, and beer are served in minute portions. The girls eat supper and then retire only to begin again at eight

---

[1] Ibid., p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 63.

o'clock the same morning. Some girls, like Mary Barton, go home every evening but others such as Ruth Hilton live above the shop in what Mrs. Mason calls her 'establishment'. But dressmaking had some compensations. Occasions like the annual hunt-ball confirmed the young dressmaker's sense of respectability and compensated her for the poor pay and hard work. In Ruth, Mrs. Mason proudly informs her girls that one of them will be honoured by being chosen to be present at the hunt-ball.

> 'I may as well inform you, young ladies, that I have been requested this year, as on previous occasions, to allow some of my young people to attend in the antechamber of the assembly-room with sandal ribbon, pins, and such little matters, and to be ready to repair any accidental injury to the ladies' dresses.[1]

The most lucrative kind of work for women in the new order was factory work. It was lucrative but it was undependable. Industries such as the textile industry were highly sensitive to changes in market conditions. When conditions were good, employment and attractive wages were available, but unfavourable market conditions put many people out of work for varied lengths of time.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that the lucrative nature of factory work for women was also a problem. The young girls became resentful of any restraints which the home placed

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, p. 7.

on them, and because they earned sufficient money, many of them moved from their parents' home and set up house for themselves. In Mary Barton, John Barton and Mr. Wilson observe that this tendency of young girls to leave home after securing a job in a factory is one of the worst effects of factory work: "That's the worst of factory work, for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves anyhow."[1] The high wages of factory girls meant that they could indulge themselves in what Mrs. Gaskell regarded as imprudent expenditures. They spent much on fancy dress and useless trinkets which served no other purpose than satisfying their vanity and giving them ideas above their station in life. In Mary Barton, John Barton recounts the events which lead to his sister-in-law, Esther, moving out of the Barton house. Esther is a factory girl and her experiences are typical of those of many young girls who worked in factories in the new order.

> 'You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face; and got to come home so late at night, that at last I told her my mind: my missus thinks I spoke crossly, but I meant right .... Says I, 'Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker.[2]

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 43.

[2]Ibid., p. 43.

Factory work was also detrimental to good health. In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell describes the effects of working in the cotton factory on a young girl's health. Bessy Higgins, who has worked in the cotton factory since she was a child, can no longer breathe easily because fluff from the carding room has settled in her lungs. Bessy Higgins also has great difficulty hearing because of her many years of working midst the noise of the huge factories. When Margaret Hale meets Bessy Higgins, they are both nineteen years old. Margaret, who spent her childhood in the south of England in a quite, rural setting, is young and healthy. Bessy, who spent her childhood on the streets and in the factories of a manufacturing city, is young and dying.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that all these forms of work which women undertook in the new order eroded their ability to fulfill their traditional "natural duties". For the older woman, it consumed the energies which had once been directed towards motherhood and domestic management, that is, those qualities on which a woman's virtue was founded. In "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", Mrs. Dixon has to pay someone else to be a mother to her child while she is out working in a factory: "Dixon and his wife, and their eldest girl, worked in factories, and were absent all day from the house; the youngest child ... was boarded out on the week-days at the neighbour's ...."[1] As well as not having time to be a

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", Mary Barton, p. 460.

good mother, Mrs. Dixon does not have time to practise good domestic management. Whereas the poor women in the old order had made most of the food for the family, the modern working woman had to buy such provisions. This lead to a decline in the areas of domestic thrift, domestic skill, and balanced eating habits. It marked the advent of distinctly working class eating habits. Mrs. Gaskell's description of Mrs. Dixon's arrival home from work and her hasty preparation of supper foreshadows a whole tradition of historical and sociological study of the working class, which culminates in the work of such scholars as E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart.[1] In the following passage, Mrs. Gaskell focuses on the erratic nature of modern domestic life, the fragmented family-life, and the tendency for quality and thrift to be replaced by quantity and extravagance.

> Mrs. Dixon rattled out her tea-things, and put the kettle on, fetched home her youngest child .... Then she called Anne down-stairs, and sent her for this thing and that: egges to be put to the cream, it was so thin; ham, to give a relish to the bread and butter; some new bread, hot, if she could get it. Libbie heard all these orders, ... and wondered at their extravagance.[2]

---

[1] E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, and Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras", Mary Barton, p. 461.

In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell makes another comment on the domestic management of working mothers. She stresses that if women are working at jobs outside the home, their duties in the home are neglected. Mrs. Wilson voices the dilemma of the working wife when she says,

> 'I say it's Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his missis to be from home when he comes in ... her to come in by-and-by, just as tired and down in th' mouth; and how he'd like for her never to be at home to see th' cleaning of his house, or to keep a bright fire in his grate. Let alone his meals being all hugger-mugger and comfortless.[1]

With many of the wives out working, the homes of the poor lacked the warm, cheery touch of a woman. Mrs. Gaskell believed that such a home was not pleasant for a man to return to after a day at work, and for this reason he took himself to a public drinking house. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Wilson states that women should not work after they marry because their absence from home is the reason that so many men take to drinking: "I could reckon up' (counting with her fingers) 'ay, nine men I know as has been driven to th' public-house by having wives as worked in factories ...."[2] The primary function of poor women in the old order had been to make a comfortable home for the husband and children. In the new order, poor women did not have the requisite time or resources to make a comfortable home.

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 165.

[2]Ibid., p. 165.

The forementioned effects of working outside the home applied primarily to married women. Working outside the home also had distinct effects on young, unmarried girls. For example, the easy money which the young girls earned in the factories turned their interests away from domesticity. Esther, in Mary Barton, has higher hopes in life than simply marrying and having a family. For this reason she spends all her money on dresses, and whenever she has time off work she "dressed in her Sunday gown, with a new ribbon in her bonnet, and gloves on her hands, like the lady she was so fond of thinking herself."[1] Mary Barton also initially rejects domestic life among her own class in the hope of being something 'better'. The young girl's ability to earn money often meant that she left home early and therefore never received any training in domestic management. She developed a wilful disposition and extravagant tastes, qualities which Mrs. Gaskell thought detrimental to domestic happiness. Mrs. Gaskell referred to these kinds of problems in her correspondence.[2] She was involved in setting up a cooperative house for factory girls and was aware of the kinds of problems that such an enterprise might have. In one of her undated letters, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Mr. Samuel Steinthal regarding this matter of a house for factory girls:

---

[1] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 376.

> ... here and in large towns generally, the girls are daughters of factory workers, or begin to work in the mills while they live at home. They leave home (in general) because some home regulation is distasteful to them; or (often) because their meals are not what they like, - or because their parents expect too large a share of their earnings.[1]

Among the poor women in the new order, the decline in domestic competence was accompanied by a similar decline in virtue. The quiet, modest ways of the poor women in the old order were no longer found in the racy, urban settings. In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell describes the factory women of Milton as having "bold, fearless faces, and loud laughs and jests."[2] Their voices are "unrestrained"[3] and they exhibit a "carelessness to all common rules of street politeness."[4]

This loud, forward behavior marked a different attitude to all the traditional, domestic virtues of poor women. Whereas the poor women in the old order had shown deference towards men, and thus had preserved some distance between the sexes, the poor women in the new order interacted with men on a very familiar level. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell states that working girls, when greeted by young

---

[1] Ibid., p. 806.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, p. 81.

[3] Ibid., p. 81.

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

men, "held themselves aloof, not in a shy, but rather in an independent way."[1] When these girls do deign to socialize with young men, they do so with no reserve in their behavior. In Mary Barton, a young dressmaker, Sally Leadbitter, is "willing to embark on a love-affair ... for the mere excitement of the thing ."[2]

Mrs. Gaskell, like many of her generation, believed that the loss of womanly modesty was inevitable when women mixed indiscriminately with men at work, and when there was no social distance preserved between the sexes. When women were not engaged in their "natural duties", their virtue was endangered, and working outside the home in close proximity to strange men was not, in Mrs. Gaskell's opinion, women's natural duty. Even a good girl like Mary Barton is tempted by the flattery and attentions of young Mr. Carson, the factory owner's son. This is not so much an indication of a weakness in Mary's character as it is a comment on the kinds of evil that can befall young women who are unsupervised by their parents. The novel Ruth deals specifically with this question of an innocent young girl being prey to evil forces when thrown upon life without close guidance and supervision. Thus Ruth, a lonely apprentice to a dressmaker, is seduced by a handsome young man of good family and has an illegitimate

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 41.

[2]Ibid., p. 132.

child. In Mary Barton, Esther also is seduced by a wealthy young man and she turns to prostitution to support herself and her illegitimate child. The story "Lizzie Leigh" also deals with this theme. Lizzie, an innocent country girl, goes to Manchester to work and while there has an illegitimate child and dies an untimely death.

As well as unsupervised girls who are tempted by evil in the new order, Mrs. Gaskell depicts young women who are thoroughly corrupt and know no other way of life. These girls exemplify all that is harmful to womanhood in the new order. They are vulgar, loud, and degenerate. An example of such a girl is Sally Leadbitter in Mary Barton. It is due to Sally's encouragement that Mary agrees to engage in a secret love-affair with Mr. Carson, the factory owner's son.

> Sally Leadbitter was vulgar to the last degree; never easy unless her talk was of love and lovers; in her eyes it was an honour to have had a long list of wooers .... what she lacked in beauty she tried to make up for by a kind of witty boldness, which gave her, what her betters would have called piquancy. Considerations of modesty or propriety never checked her utterance of a good thing. She had just talent enough to corrupt others. Her very good-nature was an evil influence.[1]

Mrs. Gaskell believed that in the new order, the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 132.

traditional role of poor women had completely disintegrated. The role of poor women in the old order, that of being good wives and mothers, had allowed them to develop competence and cultivate virtue. In the new order, economic survival took women away from their "natural duties", and consequently the traditional qualities of competence and virtue atrophied. The lives of poor women in the old order had been richly integrated in their domestic, social, and economic aspects, and from this had followed the symbiotic relationship between competence and virtue. In the new order, the lives of poor women were highly fragmented in that, while their domestic duties demanded one kind of attitude, their jobs demanded another. The poor women in the new order had two worlds in which to be successful and they were worlds with conflicting values. In Mrs. Gaskell's opinion, these dual demands were inimical to the existence of the virtuous woman, and for this reason she believed that the poor woman had lost a great deal in the dissolution of the old order.

Most of Mrs. Gaskell's comments on the formal education of poor women in the new order were oblique in nature. In one of her stories, "The Heart of John Middleton", she briefly discusses a formal educational setting, and in North and South and Mary Barton she expounds briefly on what exactly education for poor people means. In her other works she makes only slight references to the subjects of 'school'

and literacy levels.

The school described in "The Heart of John Middleton" indicates that education in reading, writing, and religion was available for those poor families who could afford to send their children. It was expensive to send a son or daughter to such a school. The parents had to pay twopence a week as well as sacrifice the wages which the child would earn working in a factory. The following description is given by John Middleton who goes to school in order to be near his sweetheart, Nelly.

> It was a different place to what I had thought it before I went inside. The girls sat on one side, and the boys on the other .... The master sat in the middle, and kept pretty strict watch over us. But I could see Nelly, and hear her read her chapters; and even ... a long list of hard names ....[1]

In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell states that Mary goes to school but she does not elaborate on the kind of education that Mary receives. It is probable that it is much like the education which John and Nelly receive. Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" "kept a small school for very young children"[2] but again Mrs. Gaskell does not elaborate on the statement.

Among the poor women in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction, some can read and they read primarily the Bible. Mary Barton is described as "sitting at the end of the dresser, with the

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Heart of John Middleton", Cranford, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 387.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh", Cranford, p. 216.

little window-blind drawn on the side, in order that she might see the passers-by, in the intervals of reading her Bible."[1] Margaret Hall in "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" can read out a few words in the Bible, and the more difficult passages she asks Libbie to read. But all the poor women are not literate. Mrs. Davenport, in Mary Barton, is illiterate. The fact that attending school cost money and deprived the family of a young girl's earnings leads one to conclude that many young girls were denied formal education, just as the following passage reveals that Mrs. Davenport's children are probably denied schooling because the Davenports need their children's wages. When John Barton prepares to leave for London as one of the Chartist delegates, Mrs. Davenport implores him to take the following message to Parliament:

> 'I'm sure, John Barton, if you are taking messages to the parliament folk, yo'll not object to telling 'em what a sore trial it is, this law o' theirs, keeping children fra' factory work, whether they be weakly or strong.[2]

Mrs. Gaskell gave limited attention to formal education in reading and writing, because, in her opinion, that was not the kind of education which poor people needed most. In North and South, Margaret Hale makes a statement which strongly reflects Mrs. Gaskell's position on education for the poor.

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 123.

[2]Ibid., p. 129.

> 'I know I do not care enough about schools. But the knowledge and ignorance of which I was speaking did not relate to reading and writing - the teaching or information one can give to a child .... what was meant was ignorance of the wisdom that shall guide men and women. I hardly know what that is.[1]

In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell also speaks on education as wisdom. The kind of education or knowledge to which Mrs. Gaskell is referring is that which the poor women in the old order had received, training for life. The disintegration of the traditional role of women was accompanied by the disappearance of the training experiences for that role, but no new training clearly emerged to replace the old. How could poor women be educated for their role in society if society was not certain what that role was? This was the dilemma concerning poor women in the new order.

In her work among the poor, Mrs. Gaskell observed that the training in domestic skills which the mother had once been obligated to provide for her daughter was now performed perfunctorily by a working mother, or not at all. Mrs. Wilson, in Mary Barton, worked in a factory as a young girl and admits that she received no training in domestic management: "I had been in a factory sin' five years old a' most, and I knew nought about cleaning, or cooking, let alone washing and such like work."[2]

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, p. 139.

[2]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 164.

Other kinds of skills such as sewing and dressmaking were obtained outside the home by apprenticing. Even food was no longer prepared by wives but was purchased at stores.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that the poor women in the new order were also untrained as to their position in life. The old relationship between the sexes of respect for men and chivalrous regard for women was no longer viable, but nothing had emerged to replace it. The women of the new order were not educated in an understanding of their place in the larger social fabric, but in the new order who knew what this place was?

In summary, Mrs. Gaskell's perception of the education of poor women in the new order was primarily negative. The poor women were distinguished by what they did not command and did not have, that is, competence and virtue. Their impoverished education and their lack of a training period for life were a function of the disintegration of the traditional role of women in society, and the failure to find a satisfying new role.

The previous chapter argued that in the old order competence and refinement, as in the case of the respectable woman and competence and virtue, as in the case of the woman of the lower orders, were fully integrated. The qualities of the virtuous woman had a symbiotic relationship which thrived in the old order.

This chapter has argued that in the new order Mrs. Gaskell perceived the disintegration of the bond between

competence and refinement, or competence and virtue. The new order produced respectable women who had no competence and false refinement, as exemplified by Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters, or no competence and true refinement as exemplified by the ladies in Cranford. The new order produced poor women who had neither competence nor virtue. In short, Mrs. Gaskell believed that the new order was inimical to the existence of the virtuous woman.

Mrs. Gaskell did not perceive any new social relationships emerging in the new order that were in any sense satisfactory. Whereas relationships in the old order had been based on the concept of duty, in the new order relationships no longer appealed to duty but to rights. Mrs. Gaskell believed that the stress on rights only lead to the isolation of the individual and the failure to understand the interdependency of members of society. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell observes that "class distrusted class, and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both."[1] This stress on rights also had effects on personal relationships. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gibson's self-seeking ways ultimately drive Mr. Gibson from her company. Mrs. Gaskell believed that in the new order, the stress on rights lead to non-supportive social relationships. In the old order a woman had had the comfort of knowing her place and her duty,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 221.

and this had been conducive to inner peace and self-acceptance, both of which facilitated the realization of her womanly role. In the new order women had to define a new role and new relationships for themselves, and this obligation fell heaviest on those least capable of doing it. Mrs. Gaskell knew it was a difficult problem, and she was not very optimistic that it would be successfully solved. As a woman, she was herself personally aware of the modern woman's dilemma, and she despaired over it. In April of 1850, she wrote in a letter to her friend, Eliza Fox, her feelings on this subject:

> Yes, the discovery of one's exact work in the world is the puzzle: I never meant to say it was not. I long (weakly) for the old times where right and wrong did not seem such complicated matters; and I am sometimes coward enough to wish that we were back in the darkness where obedience was the only seen duty of women.[1]

Mrs. Gaskell's comments on the education of women in the new order also convey her lack of optimism regarding new roles and relationships. Education in the new order seemed to reflect only confusion and lack of correct priorities. In the respectable middle class especially, there were diverse opinions as to what constituted a proper education for a young girl, but the most popular type of education was the education of 'accomplishments'. This education promoted the atrophy of competence and the rise of false refinement,

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 109.

the qualities which Mrs. Gaskell believed distinguished the modern respectable woman. Among the poor classes, the working mother and working daughter meant that education as training for life had all but completely disappeared, and in the process of its disappearnce the poor women of the new order were divested of competence and virtue.

Mrs. Gaskell was not an ideologue and this made her observations all the more valuable to her own and later generations. Perhaps it also accounts for the fact that she had no particular vision of woman's role in the future. She simply recorded what she observed and urged a little compassion.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored Mrs. Gaskell's ideas concerning the respective claims of the old and new orders, or the pre-industrial and industrial worlds, by examining her views of the role of women in each.

The third chapter argued that in the old order the lives of women were richly integrated in their domestic, social, political, and economic aspects, and for this reason there existed a symbiotic relationship between the qualities which characterized a virtuous woman - competence and refinement as in the case of respectable women, or competence and domestic virtue as in the case of the women of the lower orders. An important factor which made this virtue possible for women in the old order was the stress on duty and responsibility. Individuals had duties and responsibilities which were distinctive to their sex and station in life, and Mrs. Gaskell believed that this afforded all members of society, especially women, the opportunity to experience the dignity which accompanied the proper fulfillment of a social role. This stress on duty resulted in the frequent interaction between the different orders in society, and in this sphere Mrs. Gaskell believed women of the old order played a most effective role of considerable social, political, and economic importance.

This interaction between the different orders in society gave the old social order a distinctly human and Christian tone in which there existed a quality of benevolence and "kindness (somewhat dictatorial)."[1]

Complementing the duties which accompanied one's sex and station in life was the preparatory education and training. Mrs. Gaskell believed that because women's role was clearly defined in the old order, the education and training which they received as girls was functional and sensible. She always valued good training, as preparation for "natural duties", over the acquirement of accomplishments and languages, and she believed that in the old society this order of educational priorities was devoutly regarded.

The fourth chapter argued that in the new order the lives of women became highly fragmented. Among the new middle class, the traditional social functions of respectable women were allocated to servants and governesses and this resulted in the women's loss of competence. Because the respectable women no longer had a genuine, meaningful social function, and therefore no opportunity to demonstrate competence, they lost the true refinement which, in the old order, had been directly related to the proper execution of their role. That is, respectable women in the new order did not possess true refinement because they had no genuine functions to fulfill.

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford, p. 1.

Their refinement was therefore false refinement, related only to the purpose of display. In the case of poor working women, there was a complete atrophy of domestic competence and virtue as these women left their homes to seek paid employment. In the cases of both respectable and poor working women in the new order, the symbiotic relationship between competence and refinement, or competence and virtue, was broken.

Mrs. Gaskell believed that the atrophy of the concept of duty and the rise in the belief in individual rights and self-interest did much to make womanly virtue an impossibility in the new order. Whereas in the old order role and duty were clearly defined, in the new order no such clarity was operative. Whereas in the old order the strong had obligations towards the weak, in the new order these obligations did not exist. Rather, in the new order the appeal to individual rights and self-interest rendered this belief an anachronism and the weak were left to fend for themselves. Mrs. Gaskell saw this new social doctrine as having great implications for one of society's politically and economically weakest segments - women. It was her belief that the new order discarded and eroded the conditions which had formerly enabled women to lead dignified, virtuous lives.

This erosion of traditional roles and duties in the new order was accompanied by considerable confusion with regards to the education and training of young girls. Respectable women were subjected to all kinds of fads in educational practice, but the consensus was that a young girl should be transformed into a 'lady' by receiving an education of

accomplishments. This highly decorative but useless education was what, in Mrs. Gaskell's mind, characterized the respectable woman in the new order. Poor working women, she believed, were distinguished by their utter lack of anything resembling education or training.

Although Mrs. Gaskell stated in her preface to Mary Barton that she knew "nothing of Political Economy",[1] she did not hesitate to make value judgements about life in the new order as compred to life in the old order, and in doing made a political statement. In her view, industrialism had primarily negative implications for the role of women, and in saying this she was making a value judgement about industrial society as a whole. In maintaining this view about what we today know as the Industrial Revolution, Mrs. Gaskell represents one historical interpretation of the nature and effects of industrialism in England.

Regarding the Industrial Revolution, its nature and impact on society, there were two schools of thought during Mrs. Gaskell's lifetime, as indeed there are today. One view, more simply referred to as the view of the 'pessimists', is that the Industrial Revolution was a great catastrophe for the labouring poor and that their standard of living declined. Balancing this view is the view of the 'optimists', which

---

[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 38.

asserts that industrialization improved the lot of the common man by raising his standard of living and delivering him from the indignities of feudal life. These conflicting views are both concerned with the short term effects of the Industrial Revolution, for the long term effects have certainly been beneficial to working people in terms of an improved standard of living and increased material prosperity. It is the conflicting views of the short term effects which, according to E.P. Thompson, have rendered the period of the Industrial Revolution "an academic battlefield."[1]

The most recent orthodoxy is that of the 'optimists' and it was first proclaimed in this century by Sir John Clapham in his book Economic History of Modern Britain (1927). Later advocates of this view have been Professor F.A. Hayek in his book Capitalism and the Historians (1954), and Professor T.S. Ashton. By means of quantitative evidence with regard to real wages, cost-of-living, material prosperity, and consumption figures, the 'optimists' put forth their case that the Industrial Revolution was largely beneficial to the labouring poor and society as a whole. But recent re-examination of such evidence leads historians such as E.J. Hobsbawm to conclude that "the evidence is thus not at all favourable to the 'optimistic' view"[2] simply because

---

[1]E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 87.

[2]E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 87.

> it is now generally realized that the statistical basis of Clapham's conclusions is too weak to bear its weight; especially as the argument for the period 1815-40 odd turns largely on the question whether the curve of the cost-of-living sloped downwards more steeply than that of money-wages, it being admitted that both tended to fall. Clearly in extreme cases, eg., when prices fall and wages rise or the other way round, even a thin index may be reliable. In this case, however, the possibilities of error are much greater.[1]

There are other factors which weaken the 'optimists' argument. For example, there is not sufficient data to prove that unemployment was not a severe problem, while there exists many accounts by contemporaries suggesting that it was. An excellent example of a contemporary of the nineteenth century "safely" asserting that unemployment was severe is Henry Mayhew in his work London Labour and the London Poor (1862), where he states that

> estimating the working classes as being between four and five million in number I think we may safely assert ... that ... there is barely sufficient work for the regular employment of half our labourers, so that only 1,500,000 are fully and constantly employed, while 1,500,000 more are employed only half their time, and the remaining 1,500,000 wholly unemployed, obtaining a day's work occasionally by the displacement of some of the others.[2]

Thus the 'optimists' view of the Industrial Revolution

---

[1] Ibid., p. 67.

[2] Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 364-5.

has been rigorously challenged and found wanting, and its fifty-year sojourn in academic circles has rendered it no longer radical in nature. As E.P. Thompson observes, the new orthodoxy is now, in its turn, growing old and entrenched in most of the academic centres, so it becomes open to challenge in its turn.[1] Indeed, historians such as Peter Laslett in his book, The World We Have Lost (1965), have emphatically restated the view that the Industrial Revolution was catastrophic in its effects on the lives of the labouring poor.

It is ironic that the 'optimists' interpretation of the Industrial Revolution is being refuted by the quantitative methodology by which they support their argument. Like the quantitative historians of the 'optimist' school, Laslett makes use of data from historical records, some of which is judged to be just as scanty and questionable as that which the 'optimists' employ, but he uses it to assert the opposite point of view. Surely the lesson here is that the quality of life is not something which can be measured in wage levels and consumption patterns. It is this belief, which has gained ascendency in the second half of the twentieth century, which makes Mrs. Gaskell's perception of industrialism and its effects on society extremely important. Although she witnessed the poverty and suffering of the labouring classes and sympathized with them, she believed that their real loss was a spiritual

---

[1] E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 214.

one and this was the loss she mourned most deeply. This same belief is articulated by E.P. Thompson in his book, The Making of the English Working Class (1963):

> ... the most better conflicts of these years turned on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series. The issues which provoked the most intensity of feeling were very often ones in which such values as traditional customs, 'justice', independence, security, ... were at stake .... The classic exploitive relationship of The Industrial Revolution is depersonalized, in the sense that no lingering obligations or mutuality - of paternalism or deference ... - are admitted. There is no whisper of the 'just price', of of a wage justified in relation to social or moral sanctions ....[1]

The re-affirmation of the 'pessimist' interpretation of the Industrial Revolution by such historians as E.P. Thompson, E.J. Hobsbawm, and Peter Laslett restores to prominence some earlier historians of this century such as ARnold Toynbee and J.L. and Barbara Hammond. It also results in the works of the traditionalist social radicals of the nineteenth century, such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, George Eliot, and Charles Kingsley having greater significance and importance than ever before, for as E.P. Thompson observes,

> ... we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves. In some of the lost causes of the people of the Industrial Revolution we may discover insights into social evils which we

---

[1] Ibid., p. 222.

> we have yet to cure. Moreover, the greater part of the world today is still undergoing problems of industrialization.... Causes which were lost in England might, in Asia or Africa, yet be won.[1]

Having outlined the conflicting interpretations of the Industrial Revolution, it is abundantly clear to which school of thought Mrs. Gaskell belongs. What remains to be ascertained is the adequacy of her account as compared to that of other writers of the classical school, and to what extent her observations are a valuable contribution to the history of the period.

Fundamental to Mrs. Gaskell's perception of the period is the belief that the emerging society was distinctly different and separate from the old traditional society of the eighteenth century, and that this fact necessitated a dichotomous historical view. For her this finds expression in her concept of the old and new order. This belief was shared by other intellectuals of her day, the titles of whose works reflect this sense of the old as opposed to the radically new, hence, Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present, Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, and John Ruskin's concept of the "organic" and "mechanical" societies as representing two antithical kinds of social experience. Industrialization was conceived of as a change that was so radical and far-reaching in its implications that the pre-industrial society immediately became history.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 13.

Inherent in Mrs. Gaskell's view of the old and new order was the belief that the old order was a superior social system. There is ample literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to demonstrate that Mrs. Gaskell was not alone in this belief. Such works as Dickens' Hard Times (1854), Carlyle's Past and Present (1843), Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850), and George Eliot's Adam Bede (1859) and Felix Holt (1866) all decry life in the new order, or nostalgically call forth bucolic scenes of pre-industrial England as testimony of all that had been destroyed by industrialization. Thomas Hardy carries this tradition into the twentieth century in such works as The Woodlanders (1887), Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1896). Therefore, Mrs. Gaskell does not want for good company in her conviction that the old order, with its stress on tradition, custom, duty, and place, was superior to the new order which saw the breakdown of all these values.

In the abundance of books written about women and women writers, Mrs. Gaskell is frequently cited as an author who gives fine literary descriptions of the lives of women in the nineteenth century, and one whose shrewd powers of observation miss not one source of female joy, anxiety, sadness, or frustration. It is as an observer and recorder that Mrs. Gaskell is chiefly valued, for it cannot be disputed that, apart from her belief in Christian brotherhood and love, her writing lacks a programmatic dimension. Although she experienced

the transition from life in the old order to life in an industrial society and witnessed the effects of this transition on other women's lives, and although she wrestled with the dual roles of wife and artist, she still hesitated to make any recommendations regarding women's role, other than those sanctioned by the Victorian society in which she lived.

If this absence of revolutionary recommendations is a definite limitation to Mrs. Gaskell's over-all analysis of the 'woman question', it is a limitation which can be viewed in an historical perspective. In her book, A Literature of Their Own (1977), Elaine Showalter argues that women's writing can be divided into three developmental phases, and that in each successive phase women writers address themselves to the 'woman question' in different ways. The first phase covers the period from 1840-1880 and is called the 'Feminine' phase. The second phase extends from 1880-1920 and is termed the 'Feminist' phase. The third and final phase is from 1920 to the present and Showalter calls this the 'Female' phase. These three phases are loose and overlapping but they attempt to structure in an historical manner the evolving views of women looking at and writing about women.

The 'Feminine' phase, which extends from 1840-1880, is that literature, Showalter contends, which is an imitation of the male tradition, and it is to this phase that Mrs. Gaskell belongs. According to Showalter, the women writers of this phase internalized the standards of the male tradition and in

doing so they copied its characters, plots, and values and advanced a justification for a male-dominated world. These characteristics are very evident in much of Mrs. Gaskell's writing. As mentioned in previous chapters, Mrs. Gaskell stresses in her literature and in her correspondence that woman's sphere is the home and family, for these are her "natural duties". In her literature she does not hesitate to instruct her readers that it is a woman's duty to love and obey her husband and that great satisfaction results from giving this pure, wifely love. Mrs. Gaskell reiterates again and again that modesty, self-sacrifice, and quiet submission to male authority are the characteristics which a woman must cultivate, and it is in the development of these qualities that her true glory lies. This was the accepted view of woman's role in patriarchal Victorian society, and the very fact that Mrs. Gaskell numbered such traditionalists as John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Carlyle among her friends testifies to her eloquence in asserting the legitimacy of a male-dominated world.

Another characteristic of the 'Feminine' phase, according to Showalter, is the inability of the women writers to rid themselves of the guilt which writing professionally engendered. Literature was traditionally a masculine calling and the writers of the 'Feminine' phase experienced great anguish from engaging in something so unladylike. To relieve this guilt and anguish, Showalter states that they made con-

stant attempts at atonement. For example, they gave their professional earnings to charity, or like Mrs. Gaskell, they often let their husbands pocket their earnings, or again like Mrs. Gaskell, they used their money to pay for family trips or buy their families new homes. After the publication of Ruth (1853), Mrs. Gaskell remarked, "I must be an improper woman without knowing it."[1] This suggests that she was not secure about her professional status, and the rancour which followed the publication of her controversial novel, Ruth, she interpreted not as an assault on her artistry, but on her femininity.

With respect to Showalter's typology of "Feminine," "Feminist", and "Female", it is the latter two phases in which women writers overtly declare dissatisfaction with women's status in society, and thus begin writing argumentatively, and finally, in the "Female phase, embark on a journey of self-discovery which aims at identity and psychic integrity. In that Showalter views the female literary tradition in an evolutionary perspective, her typology attributes importance and significance to all three phases, for each phase anticipates that which follows it. It is for this very reason that Mrs. Gaskell's analysis of women in the pre-"Feminist" phase is so important. As Patricia Thomson states in her book, The Victorian Heroine (1956),

---

[1]J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 223.

> In these earlier novels of the Victorian age, we find that the feminist impress, although fainter, is far more fascinating. It is here that we can observe the insidious percolation, often against the author's will, of the new ideas that were beginning to undermine the Victorian domestic idyll. It was not so easy, then, as it was for authors, later, to decide on which side of the fence they would sit, for the fence was only in the process of construction.[1]

Thus the lack of startling recommendations in Mrs. Gaskell's work is historically explicable and, it might be argued, is more than compensated for by the richness and precision of detail with which she documents her analysis. As Patricia Thomson states, it renders these earlier novels "far more fascinating." In exploring the 'woman question' in her day, Mrs. Gaskell wrote under no banners and marched for no causes, and for this reason her analysis does justice to the complexity of the question rather than simplifying it.

One reason why Mrs. Gaskell's analysis is so complex is that she judged situations in terms of the individuals who were in them. She did not fall into the trap of viewing the sexes as stereotypes. She saw life as a relationship between living individuals and refused under any circumstances to think of mankind in the abstract terms of legal stipulations, class, or gender. For example, much of Victorian society criticized the work of Florence Nightingale, as it was so contrary to the accepted role of women. But Mrs. Gaskell

---

[1]Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 7.

issued full-hearted support and admiration to one whom she regarded as a wonderful individual. Indeed, her one criticism of Florence Nightingale, which she wrote to Emily Shaen in October 1854, was that "F. does not care for individuals ... but for the whole race as being God's creatures ... That text always jarred against me, that "Who is my mother and my brethen?" - and there is just that jar in F.N. to me."[1] Another example of Mrs. Gaskell's reluctance to approach human problems on anything other than an individual basis was her perfunctory signing of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1856. She viewed it as being quite meaningless because, in her opinion, no human law could really prevent inequities and bring about lasting reform.

The point worthy of attention here is that while in the latter half of the twentieth century women find themselves considerably closer to full social and legal equality than ever before, many of the problems to which Mrs. Gaskell addressed herself still remain unsolved. Mrs. Gaskell's belief that women's "natural duties" must receive first priority is a belief which today is still highly contentious among women. Her belief that women can indeed perform men's work, as when Miss Galindo becomes Mrs. Horner's clerk in My Lady Ludlow, but that it only leads to confusion and hostility between the sexes is a belief which finds modern expression in the sociological phase of 'sex role confusion'. In her novels

---

[1] J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard ed., The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 317.

Mary Barton and North and South, Mrs. Gaskell observes that when a woman goes outside the home to work, she assumes a dual set of responsibilities where she formerly had only one. This is still a reality for many working women today. So many of the problems which Mrs. Gaskell observed, but for which she could offer no real solutions, are problems for which individual women today are still searching for answers. So in this sense, Mrs. Gaskell's analysis for the 'woman question' is profound, for the questions which she rhetorically asks we have not yet been able to answer.

In the final analysis, Mrs. Gaskell's views about women in the old and new orders constitute a political statement. She was a product of the eighteenth century and so she esteemed a clearly-defined, well-ordered society. In Cranford, Miss Deborah Jenkyns; preference for Dr. Johnson - as compared with Captain Brown's liking for Mr. Boz - is also Mrs. Gaskell's preference, and in the case of both ladies it goes beyond purely literary concerns. Mrs. Gaskell believed that a society which defined rank and asssigned duty offered some security to its members as well as the opportunity to experience the dignity which accompanied the proper fulfillment of one's station in life. What one's station was was not important, but rather that one did it honour. For this reasons, although Mrs. Gaskell's female characters of the old order do not lack eccentric, amusing qualities, neither do they lack dignity and integrity. Her female characters of the new order, of which Clare Gibson, Fanny

Thornton, and Mary Barton are prime examples, flit from one anxiety to another and lack these deeper, finer qualities. For this reason their womanhood is diminished.

Despite the fact that Mrs. Gaskell's analysis of industrialism and its effects on women lacks a prescriptive dimension, and despite the fact that she was a middle class lady who could only view industrialism as a force disruptive to her own established values and way of life, her observations are astute and therefore possess value because they provide posterity with one more record of "what man has done and thus what man is."[1]

---

[1]R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 10.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

EDITIONS OF MRS. GASKELL'S WORKS AND HER CORRESPONDENCE

Chapple, J.A.V. and Pollard, Arthur ed., *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cousin Phillis*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

_____ *Cranford*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907.

_____ *Mary Barton*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972.

_____ *Mary Barton*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908.

_____ *My Lady Ludlow*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons., 1906.

_____ *North and South*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

_____ *Ruth*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

_____ *Sylvia's Lovers*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

_____ *Wives and Daughters*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

_____ *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.

CRITICAL WORKS

BOOKS

Chadwick, Esther, Alice. Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes, and Stories. New York: F.A. Stokes, 1910.

Craik, W.A. Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel. London: Methuen, 1975.

Ganz, Margaret. Mrs. Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969.

Gerin, Winifred. Elizabeth Gaskell, A Biography. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Hopkins, Annette, Brown. Mrs. Gaskell Her Life and Work. London: J. Lehmann, 1952.

Martin, Hazel, T. Petticoat Rebels. New York: Helios Books, 1968.

Parrish, Morris, Longstreth. Victorian Lady Novelists: George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, the Bronte Sisters. New York: B. Franklin, 1968.

Pollard, Arthur. Mrs. Gaskell, Novelist and Biographer. Manchester: University Press, 1965.

Rubenius, Aina. The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works. Uppsala: Kraus Reprint, 1973.

GENERAL SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916.

Basch, Francoise. Relative Creatures. London: Allen Lane, 1974.

Calder, Jenni. Women and Marriage In Victorian Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Carlyle, Thomas. Past and Present. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1912.

Chapone, Mrs. Letters on the Improvement of the Minds. London: H. Hughs, 1774.

Clapham, John. Economic History of Modern Britain. Cambridge University Press, 1930.

Collingwood, R.G. The Idea of History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Dickens, Charles. Hard Times. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1936.

Eliot, George. Adam Bede. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1948.

_____ Felix Holt. Boston Jefferson Press.

Hammond, J.L. and Barbara. The Bleak Age. West Drayton, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947.

_____ The Village Labourer. London: The British Publishers Guild, 1948.

Hardy, Thomas. Jude the Obscure. London: The MacMillan Company, 1975.

_____ Tess of the D'Urbervilles. London: The MacMillan Company, 1967.

_____ The Woodlanders. London: The MacMillan Company, 1967.

Hayek, F.A. ed., Capitalism and the Historians. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

Himmelfarb, G. ed., Essays on Politics and Culture. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962.

Hobsbawm, E.J. Industry and Empire. Letchworth, Hertfordshire: The Garden City Press Ltd., 1968.

_____ Labouring Men. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972.

Hoggart, Richard. The Uses of Literacy. London: Chatto and Windus, 1957.

Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Howard, Lucas, and Goode ed., Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966.

Keating, P.J. The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971.

Kingsley, Charles. Alton Locke. London: Cassell, 1967.

Laslett, Peter. The World We Have Lost. London: Methuen and Co., 1965.

Mayhew, Henry. London Labour and the London Poor. London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967.

Mill, J.S. The Subjection of Women. New York: Source Books, 1970.

O'Malley, I.B. Women in Subjection. London: Duckworth, 1933.

Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Thompson, E.P. The Making of the English Working Class. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963.

Thomson, Patricia. The Victorian Heroine. London: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Williams, Raymond. Culture and Society 1780-1950. Harmondsworth Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1966.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. A Vindication of the Rights of Women. New York: Norton Library, 1975.

Young, G.M. Portrait of an Age. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

Miller, P.J. "Education of the English Lady, 1770-1820." Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Alberta, 1969.

Sawdey, Barbara Christiane Meihoeffer. "Between Two Worlds: A Study of the Heroine in the Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell." Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975.